



# CAPITOL COMMISSION™

## When the Innocent is Condemned...

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MARK 1:12-13

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Michael Morton spent years in prison for a crime he did not commit.<sup>1</sup> In 1986 his wife Christine was attacked and killed in front of their 3-year-old son. Morton was at work at the time but authorities still suspected him. He was arrested, charged, and convicted of her murder. He spent the next 25 years in prison. Evidence that might have exonerated Morton was kept from the defense and never presented at trial. Finally, a group of attorneys working pro bono on his case exposed the grave miscarriage of justice. The evidence was tested for DNA and Morton's sentence was overturned and another man convicted of his wife's murder.

We are greatly saddened and angered when we hear of an account such as this. Many states have passed legislation seeking to prevent these types of cases and compensating and assisting those who have experienced such an injustice.

The emotional impact of such a story gives us just a slight glimpse into the amazing truth of the gospel message. Jesus Christ, who was completely innocent, suffered the ultimate sentence for crimes He did not commit. Michael Morton was finally proven innocent by modern science – a DNA test. Immediately following the baptism of Christ we have a test that proved His innocence – that demonstrated that He was indeed the sinless Lamb of God:

*<sup>12</sup> Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup> And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him. Mark 1:12-13*

(Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13 both give us a fuller account of this event in Christ's life. I encourage you to read one or both before you continue in this study.)

It is significant this event immediately followed Jesus' baptism with the approval by the Father and empowerment by Spirit. This is now a test to demonstrate Christ was indeed God's beloved Son. In this test I believe we find a vivid example of another of the "diverse excellencies" of which Jonathan Edwards spoke. As God Jesus was perfect, sinless, Holy, worthy of all worship. As a

man Jesus allowed Himself to be tempted by Satan. As with His baptism, we quickly come to ask why Jesus exposed Himself to such temptation.

The scripture tells us that Jesus was *impelled* to go into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. The account in Matthew tells us He was led into the wilderness specifically for the purpose of being tempted by Satan. This means there was a real purpose to this trial He was about to face. The Bible shows that Jesus endured this temptation for two main reasons. Jesus successfully stood against Satan's temptation to prove He was the sinless Son of God. He also experienced this trial so that He might sympathize with the temptations we face in our daily lives.

### CHRIST'S TEMPTATION PROVED THAT JESUS WAS THE SINLESS SON OF GOD

In the Old Testament, the sacrifice for sin was to be a lamb or a bull without defect or blemish. (Exodus 12; Numbers 28:3-5). This all pointed ahead to Jesus who was to be "the Lamb of God". To be the sacrifice for our sin Christ had to be sinless. Enduring all the temptation that Satan could throw at Him proved that He was indeed sinless and innocent. We cannot conclude that the three temptations listed here were the only ones Christ faced in His life. He was most certainly tempted on an ongoing basis. The Luke account says that Satan "left Him until an opportune time" indicating there would be further temptations down the road. When Peter tells Jesus He could never go to the cross to die, Jesus rebukes him strongly saying "**Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.**" (Matthew 16:23). Satan was tempting Christ not to endure the suffering of the cross through the words of Peter. In the Garden of Gethsemane we see perhaps Christ's greatest temptation as He contemplated the suffering He was to endure in just a few hours. Yet through all this temptation, Jesus never sinned.

His sinlessness and innocence are spoken of repeatedly. In Luke 23:41 the Roman leaders proclaimed, "This man has done nothing wrong". In John 8:46 Jesus asked, "Which of you convicts me of sin..." In 2 Corinthians 5:21 Paul teaches that

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### BIBLE STUDIES

LOBBYIST / STAFF STUDY: **TUESDAYS, 12:00 NOON**, TREASURER'S CONFERENCE ROOM (EB 54)

LEGISLATOR / ELECTED OFFICIAL STUDIES: **THURSDAYS NOON**, TREASURER'S CONFERENCE ROOM (EB 54)

## *When the Innocent is Condemned...*

“God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us...” In 1 Peter 2:22 we are told that Jesus “committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth”. 1 John 3:5 describes how “in Him (Christ) there is no sin...” And Hebrews 4:15 tells us Christ “was tempted, yet without sin”.

### **CHRIST’S TEMPTATION ALLOWED HIM TO SYMPATHIZE WITH OUR OWN TEMPTATION AND WEAKNESS**

Two passages in Hebrew show us this reason for this temptation.

*<sup>17</sup>Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup>For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. Hebrews 2:17-18*

*<sup>14</sup>Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup>Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:14-17*

As our High Priest Jesus is the mediator, the attorney if you will, between sinful people and a Holy God. As our priest Jesus offered a perfect sacrifice for our sin. His work allows us continuous access to God so that we can draw near to the throne of grace. Even now, Jesus continually prays and intercedes on behalf of those who have trusted Him (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). The most encouraging part is that since He was tempted, He can come to the aid of us who are tempted. He can sympathize with our weaknesses. This gives us confidence to come before God to seek mercy and grace in our greatest times of need.

**Made Like His Brethren in All Things (Heb. 2:17)** – Jesus became like us in all things, even facing temptation. The Bible talks about how the “first Adam” in the Garden of Eden succumbed to temptation. (Gen. 3) As representative of the human race he cast us all into sin. Jesus is referred to as the “second Adam” or the “last Adam”. He too endured temptation but He stood against it and overcame it. As representative of all those who trust in Him He provides forgiveness of sin and

righteousness before God (Rom. 5:14-18; 1 Cor. 15:22-49). It is a great study to compare and contrast the temptation of Adam and the temptation of Christ, but we lack the time and space to do so here.

**Tempted in all things as we are** - We can find great encouragement in the fact that Jesus was tempted in all things as we are. This does not necessarily mean He faced every individual temptation we face. In the three satanic temptations He certainly faced every *type* of temptation which we endure. John warns us in his first letter not to love the things of the world (1 John 2:15-17). The love of the world is made up of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Jesus was hungry and Satan tempted Him to turn stones to bread – to selfishly fulfill His fleshly desires outside the will of God. This was an appeal to the lust of the flesh. He tempted Him to go to the pinnacle of the temple and cast Himself down, testing God to catch Him. This would have been a public act that brought glory and recognition – an appeal to the pride of life. Lastly, Satan showed Him all the glorious kingdoms of world if He would but fall and worship him – an appeal to the lust of the eyes. We face the same categories of temptations, and Jesus can sympathize and help us because He understands since He faced the same things.

**An Example to Follow** – While it is not the main purpose of this account, we do find a great example to follow in how to overcome temptation in our own lives. We must know our own weaknesses. We must be aware of our adversary and how devious and dangerous he is. Most of all, we must know the Word of God. That is what Jesus used to put down each of Satan’s temptations.

### **THE INNOCENT IS CONDEMNED**

We look at the case of Michael Morton with sadness and anger. We look at Christ with a sense of wonder and thankfulness that He willingly was condemned and died for sins that **WE** have committed. He suffered the sentence that **WE** deserved.

**We must repent and trust Him for this great act of grace on our behalf. We certainly should love, worship, and serve Him who did all this on our behalf!**

***He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:21)***

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/04/justice/exonerated-prisoner-update-michael-morton/index.html>