

MBC - 11/4/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
“King of the Jews”
 Matthew 27:11-26

- Matthew 27:11-26 ¹¹Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You have said so.” ¹²But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. ¹³Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” ¹⁴But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. ¹⁵Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. ¹⁶And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. ¹⁷So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” ¹⁸For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. ¹⁹Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.” ²⁰Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. ²¹The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” ²²Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified!” ²³And he said, “Why? What evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!” ²⁴So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” ²⁵And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” ²⁶Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

I. The charge against Jesus. 11-14

After Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was bound, and taken to Annas, then Caiaphas, then finally before the gathered Sanhedrin to find a legal reason to put Him to death. But the Sanhedrin wasn’t a civil court, only a religious one. They found Jesus guilty of blasphemy, but they had no authority to put anyone to death, and Rome couldn’t care less about their Jewish laws.

They needed to somehow convince Pilate, the local governor, that Jesus had committed a crime against Rome, then *they* could put Him to death, and the blood would be on *their* hands.

- And we saw in our last study that the Sanhedrin wanted to execute Jesus by crucifixion so that He would be humiliated before the people and seen as accursed of God.

Turn over to John 18, where John gives us some more detail—

- John 18:28 ²⁸Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor’s headquarters. It was early morning. (probably about 5:00 am) They themselves did not enter the governor’s headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover.

These guys are such hypocrites! They’re conspiring to murder the Son of God, but they have to keep themselves ceremonially clean! They probably think that Pilate will just go along with what they want to keep the peace. Jerusalem is filled to overflowing with Jewish pilgrims for the Passover, and he wouldn’t want to upset their religious leaders at a time like this.

A. The accusation.

So Pilate takes his place on the *bema seat* - the seat of judgment on a raised platform, and they bring Jesus before him to be judged. Think of that - Pilate is judging Jesus! Scripture tells us that one day Pilate will appear before Jesus on His bema seat! Now listen to what Luke tells us that the Jews said to Pilate—

- Luke 23:2 ²And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.”

Do you see how they’re switching to a political charge to get Pilate’s attention?: “Jesus is seducing people to rebel against Rome - and stop paying their taxes!” That was a blatant lie - Jesus said to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s. “And He claims to be a King!” To Rome, a rival royal title meant rebellion, insurrection. That’s not something that Pilate can ignore. And he really wishes he could.

Now turn with me to John who gives us even more detail here—

- John 18:33-38 ³³So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” ³⁵Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” ³⁶Jesus 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.” ³⁷Then 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.” ³⁸Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him.”

Now look back at Matt.27.11—

- Matthew 27:11 ¹¹Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You have said so.”

This is the same answer Jesus gave to Caiaphas when he asked Him if he was the Messiah. It was a *qualified* yes: “Yes, I’m a king, but you have no concept of what kind of king I am.” Pilate had no concept of spiritual things. “Jesus’ kingdom is ‘not of this world?’ He came to bear witness to the ‘truth?’” Whatever that is. Jesus is just some spiritual dreamer to Pilate, and whatever kind of king He is, He is no threat to Rome, so he just wants to just get Him out of his hair. But the Jews aren’t having it—

B. Jesus’ response.

- Matthew 27:12-14 ¹²But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. ¹³Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” ¹⁴But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

This happened earlier, didn’t it? It would have been useless for Jesus to defend Himself, and it was His time to go, so He remained silent - just as Isaiah said He would—

- Isaiah 53:7 ⁷He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

When you read this, always remember: He didn't defend Himself because He came to die for our sins! His silence is for your salvation.

And this 'greatly amazed' Pilate - he had tried hundreds or thousands of cases, and he had never seen a defendant, innocent or guilty, refuse to defend himself! Who is this Man? The word Matthew uses for "greatly amazed" (*thaumazo*) is the same word he uses for people's reactions to Jesus' miracles - *they were blown away!* i.e., Pilate was *awestruck* with Jesus. He didn't understand Him, but he couldn't ignore Him. And we get the impression that he might have been sympathetic to Jesus. So he came up with a plan to get himself out of this jam.

II. Pilate's plan.

- Matthew 27:15 ¹⁵Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted.

A. Pilate's predicament.

Apparently Pilate had instituted this custom to help his PR with the Jews. And he needed all the help he could get. Let me tell you a little about Pilate and his relationship to the Jews.

Pilate was appointed to be the governor of Judea - the southern province which included Jerusalem, from about A.D. 26-36. This was a known as a tough job assignment because the Jews there hated Roman rule. And Pilate completely lacked tact and sensitivity to the Jews and their religion and culture.

- Josephus tells us that shortly after he was appointed to his post, he allowed the Roman army to come into Jerusalem with their banners hoisted up on poles - which had the image of Caesar on them! He knew that this would offend the Jews, so he had the army come in at night, and the next morning, the city awoke to the scandal of all of these idolatrous, blasphemous banners! A crowd travelled to Caesarea, where Pilate lived and demanded that he take down the banners. He said he would meet with the protesters 5 days later in the city amphitheater, but his plan was to order his soldiers to surround the crowd and threaten to behead all of them unless they desisted!

Stupid plan. What happened was that they all refused, and the leaders bared their necks and fell to the ground, daring the soldiers to carry out Pilate's orders. They didn't, Pilate backed off and took down the banners. So Rome wasn't happy with Pilate, and the Jews hated him more than ever.

- Once, he raided the temple treasury to get money for an aquaduct project. Another time he hung up gilded shields in Herod's Jerusalem Palace dedicated to the emperor, Tiberius, with inscriptions declaring the emperor to be divine. The Jews went ballistic and wrote to Tiberius himself about what Pilate had done, and Tiberius sent Pilate a letter, furious with him being so insensitive and stupid - and he ordered him to take the shields down.

And then in Luke 13:1 we read “about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.” Apparently Pilate executed some Jewish pilgrims who were at the Temple celebrating a feast. He was totally out of touch with the people he was supposed to be leading, and he was constantly in hot water with Rome. Eventually, he was fired, and legend says he committed suicide.

So Pilate was between a rock and a hard place with this Jesus: he didn’t have a legitimate reason to put Him to death, but he didn’t want to anger the Jews in the middle of the Passover, so he had what he thought was a brilliant solution: he could use this custom to release a prisoner, and since Jesus was so popular with the people (he thought), they would release Him, and the Jewish leaders couldn’t blame him. So who was this other prisoner?

B. Jesus Barabbas or Jesus Christ

- Matthew 27:16 ¹⁶And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.

Actually, his full name was *Jesus Barabbas*! We find this in some of the earliest mss., and apparently it was so offensive to call this man by Jesus’ name, that some scribes wouldn’t insert it, but this is the way it should read—

- Matthew 27:17 ¹⁷So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you: *Jesus Barabbas*, or *Jesus* who is called Christ?”

Pilate offered them the choice between two Jesus’s: Jesus Barabbas and Jesus Christ! And he thought they would free Jesus Christ. But Pilate had made a huge miscalculation: he picked the wrong guy for the alternative! What do we know about Jesus Barabbas? Luke tells us—

- Luke 23:18-19 ¹⁸But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”— ¹⁹a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder.

Now Jn. 18.40 calls Barabbas a *lestes*, which is translated as “robber,” but Luke tells us that he was an insurrectionist and a murderer. Robbery alone wasn’t punished by crucifixion. It was not a capital crime. But insurrection against Rome was. And this word *lestes* was constantly used by Josephus of the Zealots who launched guerilla warfare against the Roman occupation. So I want you to understand this: *Barabbas was a Jewish freedom fighter against Rome!* Like the rebels fighting against Assad in Syria. To Rome, he was a rebel worthy of death. But to most Jews, Jesus Barabbas was a patriot and a hero!

- Look again at v.16, it says: “a *notorious* prisoner called Barabbas,” but that is better translated “a *notable* or famous prisoner.” He was a hometown hero. Not only that, but the other two men who were crucified with Jesus - the men we call “thieves,” were also *lestes*, freedom fighters, so all three of these men were comrades-in-arms in the rebellion against Rome! To the people, these three were the Navy Seals - fighting for their freedom.

Pilate really misjudged the situation. He probably remembered hearing the crowds crying out as Jesus entered Jerusalem: “Hosanna to the Son of David!” He thought Jesus was a rock star. But if you remember back to our study of the Triumphal Entry: those Jews had come with Jesus from Galilee. They loved Him. But the crowd gathered before Pilate was a different group: they weren’t Galileans, they were local, Judean Jews. They despised Galileans and their Prophet from Nazareth - He wasn’t going to free them from Rome, He was just going to get them in trouble with Rome!

- I.e., contrary to what preachers like to preach: the crowds that exclaimed, “Hosanna, Son of David,” were *not* the same crowds that shouted, “Crucify Him!” a week later!

So Pilate didn’t realize that he was giving them the choice between a despised, Galilean trouble-maker, and their own hometown hero. But right here, Matthew records something that we only find in his Gospel—

III. The dream.

- Matthew 27:19 . . . while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.”

Just as Pilate’s head is spinning, trying to get out of this mess, his wife interrupts his legal proceedings with her dream. And for a godless, superstitious man like Pilate, this was an omen from the gods! They were telling him that he was dealing with a “righteous man” here.

- But the question we have is: did *God* give her this dream? I believe He did! It was just one more witness to Jesus’ innocence. And it just makes Pilate and everyone else involved, all the more guilty.

And while Pilate is mulling all of this over—

- Matthew 27:20 . . . the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

So what were they saying to stir the crowds up?—

“Brothers, listen: this is our chance to set free one of our best! Barabbas has risked his life in our struggle against Rome. It’s men like him who will pave the way for Messiah to come and set us free! What kind of kingdom do you want? A glorious Kingdom, where Israel reigns over the nations, like the one Barabbas has fought for? Or the wimpy kingdom of that heretic and dreamer from Nazareth?”

‘Love your enemies’ He says! ‘Turn the other cheek,’ He says! “Blessed are the poor in spirit!” That weakling won’t even defend Himself before Caiaphas or Pilate. He only has a handful of followers and they’re all losers and Galileans. Caiaphas even told us that it’s better that He dies than have Him bring the wrath of Rome against our country. He’s a blasphemer and a fool - and He needs to die! But we need our brother Barabbas to keep fighting for us!”

Maybe you’ve never heard this before, but it explains how the crowd answered Pilate: They weren’t just *anti*-Jesus Christ, they were *pro*-Jesus Barabbas.

IV. The Substitute.

- Matthew 27:21-23 ²¹The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.”

What? He thought they would say “Jesus!” And to add to the confusion, maybe they were shouting out “Jesus!” but they actually meant “Jesus Barabbas!” So he asks them just to

make sure, and they say, “*Barabbas!*” And John adds something that just ratchets up the pressure on Pilate—

- John 19:12 . . . the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.”

So if he releases Jesus Christ, they’re threatening to run off and tattle to Tiberius, again. This is an Excedrin headache!

- ²²Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified!” ²³And he said, “Why? What evil has he done?” (What a coward! He’s the governor of this province and he’s asking a mob for their counsel?) But they shouted all the more, “Let *him* be crucified!”

They chose the wrong Jesus. An innocent Man was put to death, while a murderer went free.

- This crucifixion of three men wasn’t a last minute deal. There were already three posts set in the ground, awaiting the crosspieces to crucify 3 men: Pilate was set to crucify Barabbas and his two friends for insurrection against Rome. But when he gave into the crowd, Jesus actually took that center cross that was meant for Barabbas. He was saved by a Substitute.

A guilty man went free because an innocent Man literally took his place on that center cross. And that’s the Gospel, isn’t it? Beloved, *we are Barabbas!* We are all robbers, liars, adulterers, idolaters - but when we trust in the Man who was crucified on that center cross, all of our sins are put onto Him, and He died in our place, for those sins. Someone has to pay, someone has to die - And on the cross, God provided us with a Substitute, for all who will trust Him.

- Don’t you wonder if Barabbas ever put his faith in Jesus? You know after they released him, he watched to see what would happen to his two friends and this Jesus of Nazareth. He watched as the Roman soldiers pounded spikes through their wrists and feet and hoisted them up. That should have been him - not Jesus of Nazareth.

He knew that they couldn’t find Jesus guilty of any crime - but he was a murderer. He didn’t deserve this pardon for his crimes. The only reason he was alive was because this innocent Man took his place.

And he could hear both of his dying comrades cursing Jesus, but then he saw a change come over one of them, and heard him say to the other—

- Luke 23:40-42 “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴²And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

And he heard Jesus respond--“*Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise!*”

Did Barabbas put his trust in Jesus too? We’ll have to wait and see. Back to our story - the crowd was getting louder, and more bloodthirsty—

IV. Water for blood.

- Matthew 27:24 ²⁴So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.”

A. Pilate’s vain gesture.

What a weak-willed, spineless man. Pilate wanted all the Jews to know that this was their decision, not his. He was trying to pass the buck. He didn’t want the blame for the execution of this innocent Man - or for setting an enemy of Rome free! But he was to blame because he was in charge. And this phony handwashing didn’t remove his bloodguilt anymore than Judas removed his bloodguilt by hanging himself. Water can’t wash away blood!

But the response of the crowd was blood-chilling—

B. The curse - that proclaims the Gospel!

- Matthew 27:25 ²⁵And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!”

Now I want you to step back from this whole scene and think with me about it:

Pilate wanted to symbolically wash Jesus’ blood off of his own hands. He wanted to absolve himself from the curse of innocent blood. He didn’t want that on his head. So he declared himself innocent and then said, “*See to it yourselves!*” Does that sound familiar? That’s just what the Jewish leaders said to Judas when he wanted to give the money back for betraying Jesus: “It’s your problem now! You handle it!” Judas couldn’t handle it: he went out and hanged himself.

But these Jews didn’t believe Jesus was innocent! They believed He was guilty of blasphemy and deserved to die, so they didn’t believe they were taking a curse on themselves. When they said, “*His blood be on us and on our children!*” they were saying, “We will take full responsibility for this Man’s death!”

- And for centuries, the Jewish people have been persecuted, killed, driven out of their homelands and called “Christ-killers” because of this statement. Martin Luther even preached on this passage: “The Jews are still burdened with the blood of Christ and that will eventually push them down into hell.” That’s a good man *at his worst*.
- And of course, the Nazis picked up on Luther’s anti-Semitism and said that the holocaust was justified as the fulfillment of their own self-damnation. They bought it down on their own heads!
- In Mel Gibson’s movie, “The Passion of Christ,” he deleted the English subtitle of this verse, and had the actors say it in Aramaic! - because he didn’t want to appear anti-semitic!

So what do we say about this curse they called down on themselves? Are the Jews to blame for killing the Son of God? Yes. And so were the Romans. And so was Judas, and so are you and me, because it was our sins that put Him on the cross. Jesus came to die as a punishment for the sins of His people. So maybe we should say that the elect killed Jesus. Didn’t we just sing this? “It was *my* sins that held Him there - until it was accomplished.”

- The Jews are no more to blame for Jesus' death, than anyone else, and anyone who uses this passage as a justification for antisemitism is nothing but an ignorant racist.

Let me propose another twist on what this crowd cried out before Pilate—"His blood be on us and on our children!"*

1.) First of all, they didn't know what they were saying because they didn't know who Jesus really was—

- 1 Corinthians 2:8 (They didn't understand it) for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
- 2 Corinthians 4:4 ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

That doesn't mean they weren't responsible for what they were doing, but doesn't the Gospel promise sight for the spiritually blind? And life for those who are spiritually dead?

*Didn't Jesus Himself cry out from the cross, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

2.) Second, the blood of Jesus - the blood they called down on themselves and their children - is New Covenant blood, and that blood is all about forgiveness, not about revenge. What do I mean? Look with me at Hebrews 12 where the author is contrasting the Old and the New Covenant, and he says to us, who are under this new covenant that was instituted by Christ's blood—

- Hebrews 12:24 (you have come) to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a *better word* than the blood of Abel.

What does that mean? This is so good: When Cain killed his brother Abel, God said, "Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!" What was it crying out for? Vengeance. Retribution. Payment for his crime. But Jesus' sprinkled blood speaks a better word because it paid the price for sin, and took God's wrath, so it cries out now for mercy and forgiveness!

Five bleeding wounds He bears,
Received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers;
They strongly plead for me.
"Forgive him, O forgive, they cry,
Forgive him, O forgive, they cry,
Nor let that ransomed sinner die!"

The blood of Jesus doesn't ask for revenge, it asks for mercy and compassion. The blood of Jesus saves.

- Think about this: there is no better prayer that you can pray for yourself and your family than this: —*"His blood be on us and on our children!"* That's our Gospel proclamation to the nations!

So let me put this together: instead of hearing this as a curse on the Jewish people for all time; think of it through the lens of the Gospel: as these ignorant, lost people are crying out,

“His blood - the Blood of this innocent Man, Jesus - be on us and on our children,” does God in His grace, hear that as a prayer for mercy?

- We know this: The Gospel went forth, to the Jews *first*, and also to the Greeks. The first Christians were all Jews - the way I read Romans 11, the last Christians will be Jews. And in between, God is still saving a remnant from the Jews. That’s not a people who are beyond the reach of God’s mercy. What those Jews cried out in hatred before Pilate: “*His blood be on us and on our children!*” God will answer with grace: “And thus all Israel will be saved.”

I pray that each and everyone of us here this morning would look at the cross and ‘behold the Man’ who took the place on that cross, for anyone who will trust in Him. Look to Jesus this morning, and cry out to Him, “*His blood be on us and on our children!*”