

## The Innocent for the Guilty

Matthew 27:15-26

As we continue to examine the hours Jesus spent between the Upper Room and His burial in the Borrowed Tomb, we find Jesus once again standing before Pilate. The Sanhedrin desired the crucifixion of Jesus and brought their accusations to Pilate. After hearing their complaint, Pilate found no fault in Him. As he pondered how to handle the situation, he learned Jesus was from the region of Galilee. Knowing this was Herod's jurisdiction, and that Herod was in Jerusalem at that time, Pilate sought to pass the buck and sent Jesus to stand before Herod's court. After a time of amusement and mockery, Herod sends Jesus back to Pilate. That is where we have picked up the account today.

This passage records the familiar account of Barabbas being released and Jesus being condemned to death. Just prior to His crucifixion, Jesus takes the place of a condemned man. The innocent was declared guilty so the guilty could be set free. An innocent man died so one who was worthy of death could go free. What a beautiful picture of the salvation Jesus would provide for all men in a few, short hours.

As we consider this passage, I hope we all realize what Jesus did for us as He bore our sin and stood in our place. He endured the wrath of God upon sin so we could escape it. He died upon the cross so we might have eternal life. I want to discuss the [realities](#) revealed here as we consider: [The Innocent for the Guilty](#).

**I. The Custom Practiced** (15-18) – Here we gain some insight to the judicial practices of Jesus' day and the proceedings of this second trial before Pilate. Notice:

**A. The Custom** (15) – [Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would.](#) Bear in mind that Jerusalem and the nation of Israel was under Roman domination and rule at this time. Pilate was governor over that region of the Roman Empire. The relationship with the Romans, including Pilate, and the Jews was one of mistrust, resentment, and hostility. During the Feast of the Passover, the Romans would release a prisoner to the Jews in an effort to appease the masses that gathered in Jerusalem in hopes of preventing a riot.

**B. The Criminal** (16) – [And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.](#) Pilate had a man named Barabbas in custody within the Roman jail. He was a vile man who had been condemned of robbery, murder, and insurrection against the Roman authorities. I am certain Pilate was

pleased with the conviction and incarceration of Barabbas and hoped to see him punished for his crimes. Keep the character and crimes of Barabbas in mind as we continue through the passage.

**C. The Choice** (17-18) – Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? <sup>[18]</sup> For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. According to the custom of the day, Pilate presented the Jews with a choice: would they rather have Barabbas released or Jesus? Pilate knew Jesus was innocent of the charges brought against Him and He was only there because of the envy and hatred of the Jews.

- Although we may not be seated in a courtroom setting with Jesus standing before us physically, humanity is presented with this choice as well. At some point, everyone must choose between Jesus and Barabbas. Barabbas represents the wicked, sinful nature of mankind. He stands as a picture of those who choose to live their lives in order to please themselves regardless of what the Lord or anyone else in authority says.

**II. The Caution Presented** (19) – Here we find an interesting detail within the proceedings. Pilate's wife speaks to him during the trial of Jesus. Consider:

**A. The Caution** (19a) – When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man. We see the urgency and importance of her request. Pilate was seated on the judgment seat. He was in the midst of the trial and his wife sent word unto him concerning Jesus. She cautioned Pilate to avoid condemning Jesus because He was a just man. In essence she pleaded with Pilate to release Jesus.

- I don't believe Pilate was concerned with the welfare of Jesus or the outcome of these proceedings. He was simply trying to appease the Jews and avoid an uproar that would not be well received of his superiors. However, God used someone who had access to Pilate to warn him concerning Jesus. He was given a final opportunity to acknowledge Jesus and His innocence.

**B. The Concern** (19b) – for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. Pilate's wife was in great anguish and distress over the fate of Jesus. She had agonized over this in a dream. She was convinced that Jesus was innocent and she was concerned about the consequences of Pilate declaring Him guilty and consenting to His death. God had revealed to her that Jesus was not just an ordinary man.

- Pilate was given an opportunity to view Jesus as the Christ. He had examined the evidence and knew there was no guilt in Him. His wife had even urged caution on this matter. The Holy Spirit deals with the hearts of men regarding Jesus. Some will respond by faith and others will continue to deny His deity and provision of salvation. Tragically, like Pilate, many choose to ignore the Truth and the pleading of the Spirit regarding who Jesus really is.

**III. The Crucifixion Pronounced** (20-26) – Finally we discover the closing arguments of the second trial before Pilate and the condemnation of Jesus to be crucified. Notice:

**A. The Persuasion** (20) – *But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.* Although presented with a choice, the religious elite were determined to see Jesus condemned and crucified. They knew there was no fault in Him and their accusations were baseless, and yet they influenced the multitude to choose Barabbas over Jesus. Those who should have recognized Jesus as the Christ persuaded the multitude to reject Him. Many today seek to persuade and influence others to reject Jesus as well. At times this persuasion comes from those who should recognize Jesus as the Christ.

**B. The Preference** (21-23) – *The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.* <sup>[22]</sup> *Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.* <sup>[23]</sup> *And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.* This may have been standard protocol concerning the custom, but for whatever reason Pilate offered the choice once again to the Jews. They responded in unison: Let Him be crucified. When they were challenged in regard to their choice they became adamant and literally demanded the crucifixion of Jesus.

- Faces, circumstances, and venues may change, but the cry of humanity remains largely the same. When presented with a choice, maybe for the second, third, or numerous times, the vast majority will choose the world and the pleasures of the flesh over Christ the Lord.

**C. The Protest** (23a, 24) – *And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done?* <sup>[24]</sup> *When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.* Having found no reason for death among the accusations, Pilate challenged the Jews concerning their desires. Pilate knew that they wanted an innocent Man put to death. However, he did not allow the knowledge of truth to persuade his decision. He desired to please the multitude more than he desired to see justice carried out. In a ceremonial show, Pilate washed his hands of the matter in

an effort to declare his innocence in the verdict. He hoped to place the guilt of an innocent man being condemned on the shoulders of the Jews. This may have worked to appease his conscious or his superiors, but it did not appease God. Although all of this was within the sovereign will of God, Pilate stood guilty of rejecting Christ and forsaking Him before the Jews.

- I was reminded of a significant truth with these words. When it comes to Jesus, one cannot simply “wash his hands” of the matter. All must decide what they will do with the eternal God-Man, Jesus Christ. You must accept Him as your Savior and Lord or deny Him and face God in judgment. There is no middle ground, and indecision results in rejection!

**D. The Persistence** (25) – *Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.* The hatred of the Jews was so strong toward Jesus, they were willing to bear responsibility for His death, and even allow their children to bear it as well. They were undeterred in their efforts to ensure the crucifixion and death of Jesus. This is tragic for a people who knew He was innocent and had enjoyed the hand of God upon them for centuries. They, of all people, should’ve embraced Jesus and confessed Him as their Messiah.

- Time will not permit to discuss the ramifications of their decision, but there is no doubt it was costly for them as a nation. God hasn’t forsaken the Jews, but He isn’t dealing with them as He was. When the Lord comes again, the Jews will be gathered and restored. This confirms the need for us to embrace Christ and seek to influence coming generations to do the same. A people without the hand of God upon them face great misery and distress.

**E. The Pardon** (26a) – *Then released he Barabbas unto them.* The one condemned of murder and insurrection against the government was set free as Jesus took his place. This was clearly just a physical act, but it reveals the great spiritual truth. Jesus took the place of sinners as He submitted to the death of the cross. The guilty was released and the innocent stood condemned. Jesus bore the punishment we deserved so we could be pardoned of sin and reconciled to God. **2 Cor.5:21** – *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

**F. The Punishment** (26b) – *and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.* This is a statement that offers little detail. It simply reveals that Jesus was scourged and delivered for crucifixion. This wasn’t just a hurried flogging or whipping. Jesus was beaten mercilessly, until the point He was unrecognizable. History reveals that He was beaten with a cat of nine tails, a whip that had nine cords, each having a piece of bone, metal or stone attached to the end. This was done to deliver maximum punishment. The pieces attached to the end of the whip would grab the

flesh, and as the soldier pulled it back to deliver another lash, it would literally rip the flesh from the body of the condemned. [Isaiah 50:6 – I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.](#) [Isaiah 52:14 – As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men:](#)

- I want to remind us that this was the Son of God who was delivered to be crucified and scourged at the hands of sinful men. He willingly endured untold suffering to secure our salvation. He was beaten, mocked, and ridiculed as a common criminal. He offered His sinless body as the sacrifice for our sin. If you ever wonder about the love of Christ, consider Calvary and all He endured during this horrific process. He did that for you and me because He loved us and was determined to provide the means of our salvation!

**Conclusion:** We have discussed the last trial Jesus faced before being condemned to death. He stood before His own countrymen, and yet they cried out for Him to be crucified. His love and compassion was met with hatred and unconcern.

Through His condemnation, a guilty man walked away free, cleared of all charges and exonerated of all guilt. That is what Jesus' death on the cross accomplished for humanity. He provided the means of salvation, the way we can be cleared of all guilt and viewed as righteous in the eyes of a holy God. He endured that for you. Have you received Christ as your Savior? Have you believed on Him by faith or are you as the Jews and Pilate, rejecting the only means of salvation. It is impossible to wash your hands of Jesus. All must decide whether they will receive Him or reject Him. Choose wisely! Your eternal destination rests on the choice you make!