

Jesus Silently Accepted Condemnation for Our Guilt
Sermon on Matthew 27:15-26
Saint Mark's, Watertown
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He was pierced for our transgressions, Christ was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by Jesus' wounds we are healed.
Amen.

Introduction: Courtroom Trials often Produce Books about the Proceedings

Dear fellow onlookers during Jesus' trials:

When a famous trial is going on: not only does it generate a lot of interest at the time, but often best-selling books are written about it afterwards. You might have also noticed that those books fall into two categories....

On the one hand, there are those books authored by people inside of the trial—often: jury members, in some cases: the defendants themselves. Those books can be interesting, even enlightening. Of course, they're also usually biased; they really present only one person's version of the trial. Remember, of course, that they're written to make a profit!

On the other hand, there are those books authored by people outside of the trial—sometimes: journalists, sometimes even: historians. Often those books are a bit less biased. Usually, they draw upon many people's versions of the trial. Of course, those books are written to make a profit, too! But I'd suggest that pretty frequently they reflect the author's sincere interest in investigating the matter and getting at the truth.

God's Word to us today is the second kind of book, regarding a trial—the end part of Jesus' trial before Pontius Pilate. In his book, God is going to help us investigate Jesus' trial, in the interest of telling the truth about it. It will draw upon the perspectives of several people. And this account of the trial seeks to make no financial profit. It only aims to win your soul and mine....

Exposition: The End Part of Jesus' Trial before Pilate

God's Word to us today is Matthew chapter twenty-seven, verses fifteen through twenty-six. Before we get into this Word from God, let me set the scene....

Just like nowadays, justice back in the days of Jesus was often neither swift nor decisive. Jesus' trial before Pilate was swift, though, if not decisive. Within the course of no more than a couple hours – from the earliest rays of daybreak to not much past six in the morning – the Jewish leaders had marched Jesus across town to Pilate for trial, Pilate had marched Jesus back across town to Herod for trial, Herod had marched Jesus back across town to Pilate for trial, Pilate had questioned Jesus multiple times, and Pilate had actually declared him innocent three separate times.

Still, the Jewish leaders were intent on getting permission for Jesus to be crucified. Still, Pilate was intent on getting permission from someone to set Jesus free. So, we read—and this is God's Word to us today: **Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast** – literally, *feast after feast* – **to release a prisoner** – it was, undoubtedly, his way of ingratiating himself to the people – **chosen by the crowd** – although Pilate obviously had some say in the matter, too.

At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. His name means: *son of his father*; it could be our name, because which of us are not the children of our

father?! Now, why was Barabbas notorious? The Evangelist Mark explains: he was in prison, awaiting trial and sentencing, *with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising*. Barabbas was an active anarchist. He was trying to overthrow the government. And in so doing, Barabbas was making general mayhem among all the people by murdering some of them off!

So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate thought there could be no clearer choice in the world. There's this reprobate, creating havoc for everyone. And then, there's this upstanding citizen, creating trouble for no one—in fact, even offering some sort of spiritual hope for some people. **For Pilate knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.** It was entirely because Jesus' popularity threatened their popularity, and because Jesus' power threatened their power, that the Jewish leaders were requesting to kill him—and Pilate knew it.

Now: **While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."** Can you imagine?! Pilate's wife had not even known that Jesus would be on trial that day. Yet she wakes up, and is so troubled by dreams that she had overnight, that she has to send a message to Pilate, right while he's in the process of judging Jesus. What a warning to Pilate! What a testimony to us that Jesus really was our innocent Savior.

But the chief priests and the elders – the seventy member Jewish ruling council – **persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.** This *crowd* was probably not much the crowd from Galilee that had welcomed Jesus into town on Palm Sunday, five days before this. That crowd would have just been waking up and thinking about making their way to town from the surrounding areas in which they were camping out. This *crowd* was more likely rabble from Jerusalem—hundreds of easily persuadable and excitable “street people”. Do you think the influential people of those days could turn such a crowd toward Barabbas and away from Jesus? Don't you think that the influential people these days fake out most of our countrymen every day?

Well, going on: **"Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor**—an easy question, he thought. **"Barabbas," they answered**—much to Pilate's surprise. **"What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked**—in an astonished voice. **They all answered, "Crucify him!"**—a spectacle to liven up their day, they thought. **"Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate**—growing more and more frustrated. **But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"** Obviously, they weren't going to be persuaded.

So: **When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting** – literally, *a riot was in process of happening*: the very thing Pilate was in town to prevent! – **he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd.** I mean: can you imagine—one of our state governors, let's say, on the steps of the state house: washing his hands?! Pilate is really emphasizing Jesus is innocent. He's really emphasizing he wants no part of this. Yet, it is still Pilate's responsibility....

"I am innocent of this man's blood," he said—using a word for *innocent* employed elsewhere in the Bible only earlier in this chapter when Judas says: I have betrayed *innocent* blood. And so, Judas' betrayal and Pilate's betrayal are linked. **"It is your responsibility!"** Pilate insisted to the Jewish crowd of what had to be many hundreds in front of him.

All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and even on our children!" And it was. On the one hand, some of these people, and many of their children, must have been alive forty years later, when the Roman armies rolled in to execute God's judgment on Jerusalem's failure to trust the promised Christ he had sent to them. On the

other hand, there was not one of these people – and there are none of us! – who are not covered, along with our children, by the saving blood of Christ – and some of these, at least, and many of their children, would come to believe and benefit from that.

At any rate: *Then Pilate released Barabbas to them.* He probably couldn't imagine his "luck"! *But Pilate had Jesus flogged* – beaten with whips, to be weakened for crucifixion; sometimes prisoners died from the flogging – *and Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified.*

Application: Jesus Accepted Condemnation for Our Sin

Wow. What to make of it all, eh? I mean, you read this book on Jesus' trial and, I guess, the overall impression is a real sadness over the travesty of justice. Upon further analysis: and that's what a good book on a trial leads us to do—upon further analysis, the sense of sadness is all the worse, because we can see ourselves in the antagonists in this story. I submit to you that: you and I can relate to Barabbas, we can relate to the Jerusalem crowd, and we can relate to Pontius Pilate....

We can relate to Barabbas? Yep, that's what I'm saying. "But Pastor, he was an insurrectionist and a murderer! I haven't incited mayhem against the government; I haven't committed murder." Okay, I'll grant you that—and for that, let's thank God! But how about your heart? Exactly the same rebellion and exactly the same murder that dwelled within Barabbas' heart dwells inside your heart and mine—because we have a sinful nature, too. And I'll even say that it shows itself in our words, at least, if not so much in our deeds. Which one of us has not murdered others with our words? Which one of us has not ungratefully rebelled against the authorities in our lives? We all always know better than them! We all always know better than God, too! That means that I am Barabbas. And so are you.

We're also that crowd of Jerusalem citizens. Easily persuadable, easily excitable, it's very simple to work us up into a frenzy. The major media do it every day. And then we want the blood to flow. We want somebody crucified for their misdeeds—never mind that mine are worse. In fact, that's precisely why I want others punished: because it will make me feel better about myself – see: I'm not as bad as that guy! – and besides the spectacle of someone else's misfortune livens up my day. What damnable sin, eh?

And you guessed it: You and I are like Pilate, too—Pilate shrugging off the authority given to him, Pilate trying to push the guilt off on to the people, Pilate irresponsibly allowing an entirely innocent man to be crucified, because – selfishly! – he's thinking, "Well, they're either going to crucify me or him, and I'm not going to go through that!" And we do the same thing as Pilate did. We face a dilemma. There's the right thing to do, which will cause us more trouble, and there's the wrong thing to do, which will cause us less trouble. So, we do the wrong thing, and we rationalize it away by blaming others. And our sinful nature wins another victory.

So, we can relate to Barabbas, to the Jerusalem crowd, and to Pontius Pilate—because we have the same damnable sinful nature as they....

Appropriation: Jesus Silently Accepted Condemnation for Our Guilt

...But the one guy to whom we cannot relate in this account is the protagonist: Jesus. We haven't even really talked about him yet. But he's the focus of the account.

Isn't he a marvel?! The Jerusalem crowds holler again and again, "Crucify him!" and he says nothing. Pilate washes his hands of responsibility for Jesus' death, and Jesus says nothing. Barabbas – that evil criminal! – walks free, and still we hear nothing from Jesus. Why?!

Well: *As a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.* Jesus said nothing, but we know – at least in part – what he had to be thinking. He was thinking, “I’m willing to shoulder the guilt for Barabbas’ rebellion and murder” – and yours and mine! – “and to go through hell for it.” “I’m willing to shoulder the guilt for the crowd’s lust for blood” – and yours and mine! – “and I’ll shed my own blood for them.” “I’m willing to shoulder the guilt for Pilate’s irresponsibility” – and yours and mine! – “and to die for it.”

That’s the book on Jesus’ trial. And as good books do, this one has the power to change lives. Now you know that the debt to society for your rebellion, for your bloodlust, for your irresponsibility was paid by Jesus. So, go live a new life, for Jesus sake!!! Amen.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Jesus Christ the iniquity of us all. Amen.