

Redemption and Rejection - the achievement of the cross displayed

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[0 : 01] And you'll have to excuse me this morning, I have a bit of a frog in the throat, so if there's the odd splutter you'll understand. Well today it's all about redemption and rejection.

We've now been in Matthew's passion story for several weeks and we've come to see very clearly that it's a passion story with a purpose. Just because it is a passion with a purpose. Matthew's determined that we should see with absolute clarity the meaning and the achievement of the cross of Jesus Christ. So in chapter 26 we've already seen Matthew make it clear that Jesus' death is a Passover sacrifice.

It delivers people into their true destiny as God's new covenant people. This is the blood of the covenant, says Jesus, for the forgiveness of sins.

It's the actual complete forgiveness that all the shadows of the past pointed forward to. This is it. It's a penal substitution.

[1 : 11] Matthew tells us it's a great exchange where Jesus bears the wrath and the punishment for his people that they might be forgiven. However much today there are people who scoff and scorn that idea, it is the plain message of Matthew in this chapter.

It's so clearly betrayed by him in the two cups. The cup of forgiveness offered to all. The cup of forgiveness offered to all. And the cup of forsakenness, drunk by Jesus alone.

The cup of God's wrath, drunk in place of sinners. It's the great exchange that Paul speaks about. God made him who knew no sin to be sin.

That we might become the righteousness of God in him. We've also seen that Matthew presents the way of the cross as a real challenge.

We saw that last time. It confronts everybody. And there's only two possible reactions. Either there is surrender to the cross as Jesus himself exhibits and walks the road to glory.

[2 : 20] Or there is scorn of the cross, rejecting Christ's way. But in fact we're told very plainly that is the road to ruin. We see that in the reaction of Judas, the worldly man.

We see it in the reaction of Caiaphas, representing the worldly church. And we saw it too in the reaction of Peter himself, the worldly disciple. So now as we come to chapter 27, it shouldn't be any surprise to us that we find Matthew's preaching is just as clear.

There's still more. There's much more to the meaning of the cross of Jesus. And what he teaches us in these verses that we read in chapter 27 is another dimension still of the powerful work of Christ on the cross for us.

It's a brilliant display. It's an illustration of the achievement of the cross. And of the achievement of the cross in terms of redemption.

Not redemption as it's sometimes used in a general way, just as a synonym for salvation. But redemption in its more specific sense. Redemption is setting free.

[3 : 26] It is release by the payment of a price. Now if you think back for a minute to Jesus' own teaching about his ministry all the way through the gospel, we'll understand.

All the way through the gospel, Jesus has been clear that he is the king. He's come to establish his kingdom. And in fact, Matthew of all the gospel writers is the one that focuses so particularly on the kingship of Jesus.

He's born as the king, the son of David. He announces his ministry at the beginning. The kingdom has come. In chapter 19, remember, he talks about the new world of his kingdom, where he'll sit on his glorious throne.

And those who have followed him will sit with him. But do you remember how Jesus goes on after speaking about that in chapter 19, in chapter 20? First of all, before the new world, he says, in this world, chapter 20, verse 28, the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus' life, Jesus' own blood, is to be a ransom price, so that through that blood poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins, there would be redemption, there would be release.

[4 : 48] Release from bondage, from the penalty of sin and guilt. Release from death itself as the wages of sin. All through the precious blood, the innocent blood of Jesus.

And these verses that we've just read together today portray before us so vividly that release. It's a story all about redemption by the blood of Jesus, and yet also, and because the Bible is always honest and doesn't hide these things, also, sadly, rejection of the blood of Jesus.

And once again, Matthew makes the contrast so stark to drive it home to us, to drive home the challenge of the cross. The message is clear, the blood of Jesus, the innocent blood of Jesus, confronts everyone, and it forces a division.

To one it is, as Paul says later, the savor of life to life, but for others, it proves to be the savor of death to death. And the message of Jesus, the gospel of Jesus, always has that effect.

It always divides. We've seen it all the way through Matthew's gospel in Jesus' ministry. We see it today. Everywhere where the gospel of Christ is proclaimed, it causes division.

[6 : 11] And the closer the gospel message is to the very heart of the faith, to the cross of Christ, to the shed blood of Christ, the starker that division is seen to be.

The blood of Jesus Christ divides the world. Either it's the blood that opens the gates of heaven and brings about eternal redemption, or it's the blood that, if scorned and rejected, closes that door forever and leads to eternal rejection.

And that is Matthew's clear message here. And I want you to see how Matthew has structured his sermon to us to drive home the heart of that message. Matthew really is a brilliant writer.

As I've sat at his feet over these recent months and come to know him, I've come to appreciate immensely his work, to respect the way he's laid out his sermons for us. And my job is to try and help you to see his brilliance also, so that you also will sit at his feet with me and understand his message.

By the way, that's important. You're sitting at Matthew's feet this morning, just as I am. You're not sitting at my feet. Matthew's the preacher. Matthew is inspired by the Spirit of God.

[7 : 31] My job is just to help you hear him, to hear his words to us, so that, well, you can drink in his message yourself, but also so that you can share it with others. Somebody just told me last week that they'd been week by week explaining to our relative what they'd been hearing on Sunday morning about the cross.

And I couldn't have been more thrilled, because that's exactly what I'm here for, to help you to see Matthew's message, that you too might pass it on. So I want you to look at it carefully today.

Look first at the symmetry of this passage. Can you see it? That's really the key to getting the message here. Look at the beginning and the end, at verses 1 and 2 and verse 26.

The focus at the beginning and the end is on the fact of Jesus' death, isn't it? Verse 1, they take counsel in order to put Jesus to death. So verse 2, they delivered him up to Pilate.

Look at verse 26. Jesus is scourged and delivered to be crucified. So that's the frame of our passage.

[8 : 34] Jesus delivered to death. Then notice that the main story could jump straight from verse 2 to verse 11, couldn't it?

Verse 2, Jesus is delivered to the governor. Verse 11, Jesus is before the governor, before Pilate.

But instead of just going that natural way, Matthew has popped in between something unique. Something that's not in any of the other passion accounts in Mark or Luke. In verses 3 to 11, he gives us Judas' tragic end, Judas' destiny. And then if you look at verse 25, you'll see that he's kept the symmetry.

Because just before the end of the passage, he gives for us another tragic destiny. That of all the people and the priests, his blood be on us and our children.

And in both these accounts, 3 to 11, Judas and 24 and 25, all the people, it's Jesus' blood that's being faced up to you. Do you see? Judas says, I've sinned by betraying innocent blood.

[9 : 41] Verse 4. And the people, well, verse 24, Pilate is similarly blaming them, not himself, for Jesus' blood. I am innocent of this man's blood.

And in both these sections, the same challenge about Jesus' blood is being given. Do you see in verse 4? See to it yourself, say the priests. In other words, Jesus' blood is your problem, Judas. Verse 24, it's just the same. Do you see? See to it yourself, says Pilate. Jesus' blood is your problem. To all the people. You see, either side of the center of the passage we're looking at today is rejection of Jesus' blood.

And the consequences for those who have betrayed innocent blood. We'll come back to that. But first of all, I want you to see the centerpiece of Matthew's story, because this is the focus that his structure gives us.

We're meant to center in on these center verses, verses 11 to 24. And again, you'll see there's still more symmetry. Do you see? Verses 11 to 14, that little section, focuses on Pilate and his dealing with Jesus and his questioning.

[10 : 53] And so does verse 24. Back again with Pilate and his decision about Jesus. So that at the very heart, at the very center of the drama, verses 15 to 23, there's a focus on, well, two individuals, isn't it?

Barabbas and Jesus. Now both Mark and Luke, of course, mention Barabbas, but Matthew has ordered his whole account here, his whole description of what happened on that day, so as to flag up for us how in God's sovereign purposes, even the very trial of Jesus itself becomes an acted parable for the message of the cross for all of us.

Can you see? These central verses are a vivid display of the achievement of the cross, aren't they? They're a picture of redemption by the blood of Jesus.

Can you see here? Barabbas stands as a representative man. He's a guilty one. He's facing up to death as a prisoner. And yet, quite literally, he exchanges places with Jesus, doesn't he?

He exchanges places with the innocent one. It's all about a release brought about by a great exchange, the guilty for the innocent. A release whose price is the blood of Jesus, the innocent blood of an innocent man.

[12 : 32] And that is the redemption that's brought about by the shed blood of the Passover lamb, by the blood of the new covenant. Look how starkly Matthew presents this exchange.

You see, in verse 15, it seems that there's a way out of the dilemma for Pilate. He just doesn't know what to make of this prisoner who remains silent when charged. Verse 14 says he was greatly amazed.

But he does know what to make of the priests and the elders. Verse 18 tells us he has the measure of them all right. He knew that they were just envious of Jesus' popularity with the crowds. So perhaps Pilate thought, well, he could make a populist gesture to the crowds to get him off the hook.

He could relieve Jesus and ingratiate himself with the crowds and at the same time get one up on the Jewish leaders that he couldn't stand. We know from secular history, by the way, that Pilate hated the Jewish leaders, the priests and their people.

So he thinks, I'll offer them Barabbas. Verse 17, a notorious prisoner. Mark tells us he was a murderer.

[13 : 37] He was an insurrectionist. He was a thoroughly rotten character. I'll offer them Barabbas or Jesus Christ. Surely there's no contest. Pilate knew Jesus was totally innocent.

He knows the priests have trumped up all the charges against him. He says so publicly in verse 23. Do you see? What evil has he done? Pilate's wife has had a premonition in a dream.

She knows Jesus is innocent. Verse 19, I have nothing to do with that righteous man. Everyone knows Jesus is completely innocent.

Even Judas in verse 4 had said, I've betrayed innocent blood. And yet, verse 20 tells us that the chief priests and the elders has persuaded them all to shout for Barabbas and to destroy Jesus. So here we have it. A prisoner is to be released. Verse 15, notice the word, released. Two men stand side by side.

[14 : 42] One is a murderer, a rebel, a guilty man without question. The other is a righteous man, an innocent man. Whom do you want to be released?

Says Pilate, verse 17. Well, surely the guilty man must face death and the innocent man must go free. But no.

Look at verse 26. He released for them Barabbas and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified. It couldn't be more striking, could it?

The guilty, vile, and helpless rebel is released and the price, the ransom price, the redemption price, is the blood of Jesus, the innocent for the guilty.

There could hardly be a more wonderful picture of the sovereign grace and mercy of God in redemption. While we were still weak, says Paul, in Romans 5, at just the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

[15 : 57] While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, by his blood. There's no suggestion that Barabbas suddenly changed his ways, that he was suddenly deserving anything other than death.

Of course not. But quite literally, the blood of Jesus bought his release, his redemption. He was set free from his bondage, from his sentence of death by another's innocent blood.

You can just imagine Barabbas, can't you, at the back of the crowd as the crucifixion takes place and he sees the three crosses there and says, that middle cross was prepared for me.

That was my cross. I'm the guilty one. That's where I should have been put to death. And yet I'm here and that innocent man is dying and shedding his blood in my place.

And do you see the literal exchange on that day is a picture, it's a powerful demonstration of the great eternal exchange, of the redemption that is in Jesus.

[17 : 11] Of the release from captivity through the real and lasting forgiveness of the many, of all who drink the cup of forgiveness in Jesus' blood.

that's what Jesus' death achieves. That's what his blood achieves. Redemption. Not just a temporary release from an earthly prison and from earthly death like for Barabbas, but eternal release.

Release from the prison of this world. Release from death and spiritual death as the wages of sin. Think of Peter's words later on when he writes in his first letter, Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

And that's the great exchange that's everywhere present as we've seen in this passion narrative.

That's what's evident here in Jesus' trial. In fact, that's why there was a trial. Jesus' enemies didn't need a trial, did they?

They could have just had him quietly assassinated. They didn't want any publicity. But God determined that there must be a trial and a public trial precisely because Jesus was bearing sins for his people.

[18 : 32] That's what explains Jesus' silence before Caiaphas and Pilate. Do you see in verse 12? The elders and the priests' accusation against Jesus had been blasphemy.

He's claiming to be God. We saw that last time. When Jesus was before Caiaphas. But the charge that they brought before Pilate was the charge of treason.

That's why they said he was the king claiming to be king. It was a charge of rebellion against Caesar's rule. But you see in verse 14 Jesus remained silent. He gave no answer not even to a single charge.

No answer to the charge of blasphemy and treason. Why? Well because he was the servant of the Lord come to bear sin himself to take sin upon himself.

Isaiah 53 speaks of him. He opened not his mouth as a sheep before his shearers. He was dumb. Why? Because there was no defense to make.

[19 : 39] Because he was bearing their iniquities. He was bearing the sin of the world against God. And Jesus chose silence because he chose to be guilty.

He chose to bear guilt in order to redeem his people. And that's why it had to be these two charges blasphemy and treason.

Because these are the things that sum up man's sin against God. Remember right back at the very beginning in Eden what was man's first sin? Well it was blasphemy wasn't it?

You'll be as gods. And they grasped that deity. And it was treason rebellion against God's clear rule, his word.

But Jesus, this righteous man chooses to shed his innocent blood as Peter says later on in his letter that he might bear away our sins in his body on the tree.

[20 : 42] and that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. And that's the gospel. Redemption by the blood of Jesus.

You were ransomed says Peter not with perishable things like silver and gold but with the precious blood of Jesus. This word is the good news that was preached to you says Peter. the vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives as the hymn says because the innocent blood, the precious blood of Jesus has been shed because redemption has been achieved.

It's done. The great transaction is done. And the blood of Jesus says John cleanses us from all sin. From all sin.

Everybody here this morning. Nobody here this morning, nobody you know, no Barabbas is beyond the release and the redemption bought by the precious blood of Jesus.

[21 : 56] Jesus excuse me. That is God's sovereign work of grace and mercy on the cross. It achieves redemption through the blood of Jesus.

And that's the heart of Matthew's message here. That's what all the focus is upon. That's the good news. That's why it is good news for all who will rejoice in the blood of Jesus. He'll make it their own for all who will receive the redemption and reconciliation through his blood.

God has done it all in Christ. He's opened the life gate. He's opened it wide. And all may go in. But of course, if that is Matthew's central message, it's not his only message.

The gospel is a wonderful offer of grace and mercy, but the gospel is also a command. It's a command to receive that offer of grace and mercy and not to reject it.

And so there is always in the gospel a warning about the dark side. We've already noted here that on either side of this great central truth in the passage, on either side of the picture of redemption by Jesus, we must also face up to something else.

[23 : 14] We must face up to rejection of the precious blood of Jesus. Jesus. If the centerpiece of the great exchange of Jesus and Barabbas emphasizes the sovereignty of God's grace and mercy and salvation, and it certainly does, then the accounts on either side insist that we take seriously the other parallel truth of the gospel, that it is man's responsibility to believe and obey the gospel of Christ.

Christ. The blood of Jesus, the precious blood of Jesus, the innocent blood of Jesus, confronts every single human being and it demands a response. It forces itself upon the conscience of every human being and demands that it should be cherished, that it should be received, that it should be revered as the precious way of salvation given by God to rebel human beings.

That's the demand of the blood of Jesus, but the tragedy is, the staggering truth is, that so often the world will not have the blood of Jesus, will not accept its message, will not have its forgiving power. The world so often rejects the blood of redemption and forgiveness and in doing so, in doing so, the world calls down upon itself the curse of God.

A curse that demands that God reject them. And that is the awful reality that we've got to face up to also in these verses. It's here as a warning for us.

[24 : 57] It's a warning. Do not despise, do not devalue the precious blood of Jesus Christ shed for the forgiveness of sins.

You see, you can despise and reject the blood of Jesus in different ways. Look first at Judas. He rejected Christ's blood from a despairing conscience.

You see, we see in Judas the tortured conscience of a man who knows he's guilty. Verse 4, I sinned by betraying innocent blood. And having sinned, Judas sees how loathsome his sin really is. He sees how paltry the reward was that he thought he would gain from his sin. Few worthless coins. And sin is such a deceiver. You know that.

I know it. You've planned it. You've cherished it. The thought of the pleasure it will bring. And you've done it. And immediately there's just the emptiness.

[26 : 00] There's just. And that's Judas. And Judas discovers that the empty platitudes of religion are no help to him. None at all. And that's so true, isn't it?

of institutional religion. Totally focused on preserving itself untainted in the eyes of the world, but oh, real help to a tortured soul facing hell?

None. What's that got to do with us, they say to Judas in verse four? See to it yourself. That's your problem. We're not interested in you. And friends, the world is ruthless.

The world offers no forgiveness. forgiveness. And even religion, any religion that is just of this world can only say it's on your conscience. Work it through. You see to that yourself.

And Judas' point is that he can't see to it himself. Judas knows he's brought a curse on himself. Judas is a Jew. He knows the Bible. He knows the law. He knows the book of Deuteronomy off by heart.

[27 : 02] He knows Deuteronomy 27 verse 25 says, Cursed is anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent life. And yet Judas' reaction is staggering.

He calls down a further curse upon himself. Deuteronomy 21 verse 23 is just as clear. A hanged man is cursed by God. Judas knew exactly what hanging himself meant.

It was bringing down a curse an eternal curse upon his head. Still getting away from that. Jesus had said, hadn't he, better never to have been born than to do what Judas was to do.

Judas, we're told in Acts chapter 1 by Peter, went to his own place. But you know he did so not for his sin of betrayal.

We've already seen all the other disciples, betrayed and denied Jesus and ran away. But he did so because though he came to see the awful guilt of his sin, he didn't turn his heart to Jesus, the Saviour, to the blood that could have saved him.

[28 : 20] Remember the end of chapter 6, the last line of chapter 6, Peter, in a similar situation? Peter went out and wept bitterly, we're told. He saw his sin and his sin broke his heart.

Judas went out and hanged himself. He saw his sin, he saw the truth in his mind and yet his heart still didn't break. He tried to deal with it himself, he went back and tried to reverse the deal, take the money back.

But when he couldn't, well he resigned himself to hell. You know friends, there are people just like that.

I know people just like that. They come to see the truth about themselves and the truth about Jesus Christ and yet faced with the responsibility that that puts upon them to repent and to turn to Jesus Christ, they refuse.

They would rather face hell straight on and cherish the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses from all sin. There is power, there is release, there is transformation in the blood that Jesus shed even for the vilest offender.

[29 : 44] But many people still would rather say, I'll see to it myself. Bishop Ryle says, there is such a thing as sin against the Holy Spirit.

Clear knowledge of the truth in the head combined with a deliberate love of sin in the heart goes a long way towards it. And that was Judas' rejection of the blood of Jesus Christ, sheer perversity, suicide.

And the gruesome details that follow about the blood money and the field of blood, they fulfill the scripture, says Matthew. They remind us that the perversity of the human heart shouldn't be a surprise to those who know the Bible story.

It's a story of perversity through and through, even among those in possession about the truth of God in their heads, but whose hearts are often far from him. These references and quotations in verses 6 to 10 refer both to the prophet Zechariah and Jeremiah.

Both of these men were messengers of God's judgment on his people for their sin. Both of them were rejected and despised by the people because of their message. The specific quote about the 30 pieces of silver comes from Zechariah 11 where God's prophet is rejected and devalued as God's shepherd.

[31 : 01] He's paid off with a paltry sum of silver. But the whole story of Jesus reflects in an incredible way the life story of the great prophet Jeremiah too. Do you remember Jeremiah in chapter 18 and his image of the potter and the clay and God saying I'm going to make a mess of the clay pot of Israel and start from scratch all over again because of your sin?

Remember in the very next chapter God sends Jeremiah down to the valley of Hinnom to smash the pot in front of the leaders of God's people. I'm going to judge you he says. Why?

Because you have shed innocent blood all over this place. What was the reaction of the people? Read Jeremiah chapter 26 later on.

It's quite staggering. The priests and the prophets want to kill him. It's an astonishing parallel of Jesus' trial. The governor of the people says this man doesn't deserve death.

Don't bring innocent blood on us, on yourselves and on this city. You're about to bring disaster on yourselves. What do the people say? We don't care. Matthew's point's clear enough isn't it?

[32 : 10] Nothing's changed. Here's Pilate, the governor, saying to the people, you're bringing innocent blood on yourselves. But in verse 25, they just say, we don't care.

Bring it on. You see, the people, well, they're rejecting Jesus' blood too. Not like Jesus out of despair. They're rejecting the blood of Jesus from an utterly defiant conscience.

His blood be upon us and our children. It's brazen perversity. The cynical hardness of the priests in dealing with Judas is joined with the brazen attitude of all of them in verse 25.

All of the people, think of that, all of the people of Israel, all of the Jews, all of God's sovereignly chosen nation, all of them curse themselves willingly.

All through the law, God had made blood guilt such a terrible thing. But they just say on our own heads be the blood. They're defiant.

[33 : 13] They know Jesus is innocent. Pilate's handwashing is just a graphic illustration of that. It very probably reflects something from Deuteronomy chapter 21. A sacrifice was specially designated because blood shed in your land was such a terrible thing.

If you found a dead body in your town and nobody knew even who had killed them, the leaders of that town had to wash their hands over this sacrifice to cleanse the land of blood guilt.

It was a way of saying just how seriously they took the shedding of human blood. And the irony here is just intense, isn't it?

In the face of manifold injustice that they are involved in, they're all just glibly saying, well, call us guilty if you like. We don't care. We don't believe we're doing wrong.

In fact, we think we've got God with us in this. We don't believe God would curse us, never. We can destroy Jesus and we can still be right with God.

[34 : 17] We can scorn his blood and his atonement. We can destroy his unique authority. We can reject his demands. There'll be no consequences from God, in fact, none at all.

We'll have God's religion adapted to our way of doing things. And God will be just fine with that. God will bless that, bring it on. Isn't that just what so many people believe today?

So many people even in the professing church, isn't that right? We can dismiss the cross, we can dismiss the Bible, we can dismiss the uniqueness of Christ, and we'll be fine.

Who cares? God will say, it's all part of the same universal perversity in the heart of man. The human heart will put up with any amount of religion as long as it doesn't have to deal with the real truth about sin.

That sin really is a vast, an immeasurable affront to Almighty God that renders us utterly condemned in his sight, that renders us utterly incapable to help ourselves.

[35 : 30] See, religion says, oh, but it's manageable. You can see to it yourself with rituals and with practices. Yes, you can talk about sin, but actually sin's really just a trivial thing.

It's sorted out by a few Hail Marys, or by a bit of extra in the offering, or by doing your duty in the kirk, or whatever it is. But, talk about sin that renders you helpless, talk about sin that calls you an enemy of God, a rebel, a criminal, perverse, and twisted.

Well, never. Talk about a gospel that calls you to hope only through something that God alone can do to you, and for you, and from outside you, and that demands transformation in you, and that demands repentance from you, lest you faith the wrath and the judgment of God.

Talk about a gospel like that, and all hell breaks loose. Get rid of that gospel, get rid of that Jesus, get rid of that preacher, destroy that offensive message, we will not have it, and his blood be on us and our children.

We won't have that Jesus. See, it's still really the same reaction today as then, isn't it? Rejection of Jesus' blood from defiant consciences.

[37 : 01] But you know, they were very wrong then, very, very wrong about God. That generation did bear the curse, they and their children. They lost it all, they lost their land, they lost their temple, they lost their lives.

The Roman invasion in the sack of A.D. 70 was absolutely devastating, it was complete. Their house was, to them, utterly desperate, just as Jesus had promised. Friends, if we think like that about God today, we're just as wrong too.

God will not see ever the precious blood of Jesus scorned, especially not from those who profess to name his name.

no scorn and rejection of the precious blood of Jesus because of refusal to believe in the depth and the seriousness of real human sin and therefore rejection of the very heart of the gospel, that will,

that must always lead to rejection by God.

And we should fear, shouldn't we? If God can utterly reject his chosen nation Israel for scorn of Christ's blood, do we think that he'll preserve Christian churches, they do the same?

[38 : 24] God takes theological sin very, very seriously. God takes the issue of the precious blood of his son, the utmost seriousness. You say, we'll bear the consequences, says God, and you will bear the consequences.

You will bear the judgment of God. And ironically, you also bear the scorn of the pagan world. You see, Pilate's words to the people just echo what they've said to Judas.

And the world does scorn and scoff, doesn't it, at worldly feeble religion? The secular economists love to lampoon the church, don't they? They're always doing it.

They mock the pathetic attempts, of the church, to embrace the world, to fit in with the world, to change the message, to get rid of the scandal. The church is totally deluded if we really think that we can make the world take more notice of us, if we take less notice of the scandal of the cross. It's just the opposite. And yet the world too is deluded, isn't it, if it thinks that it can reject out of hand the cleansing blood of Jesus?

[39 : 39] Just notice as we finish that there is a third representative who rejects the blood of Jesus in this story, isn't there? There's Pilate. He's the one who tries to reject the blood of Jesus by deluding his conscience.

He thinks he can wash his hands of Jesus, brush off the blood of Jesus, leave it to the religious people. He wants to put the responsibility onto the Jews, and of course he's right. They are responsible, as they say.

But he's wrong to think that he's therefore off the hook. It's very tempting, isn't it, to think that you can wash your hands of the blood of Jesus, and the claims of Jesus, and the cross of Jesus.

Maybe you have read the Gospels, and maybe you think, yes, he was an innocent man. Yes, the priests of the people, well, they were wicked and wrong. Yes, I'm amazed, frankly, at everything he said and did, but it's nothing to do with me.

I'm innocent of this man's blood. I wasn't there. I've done nothing wrong. Well, what is it to do with me? Well, you're wrong, because you were there, and your sin was there.

[40 : 53] That's why Jesus was silent, because the world's sin was on him, and your guilt was on him. And if you wash your hands of the blood of Jesus, because you'd rather have the praise of men, like Pilate, because you'd rather have popularity and ease in this world, then you also are scorning and profaning the blood of the covenant poured out for many.

You also are trampling the precious blood of the Son of God underfoot. Yes, you are. And Pilate's question in verse 22 is the question that faces every single human being.

What shall I do with Jesus, who is called the Christ? The fact of the innocent blood, the precious blood of Jesus Christ, faces every single human being today.

Yes, it does. And many will still reject it, sometimes out of misplaced despair, fear, sometimes out of utter defiance, sometimes just out of sheer delusion like Pilate.

But that's not the right response. That's absolutely the wrong response. That's sheer perversity. The cross of Jesus Christ, the blood of Jesus, has achieved redemption forever for the criminal rebels of this world.

[42 : 27] And Matthew says to us, do not reject it. Let that redemption be yours. Don't reject the precious blood of Jesus, but rejoice in the redemption that it offers.

It's his precious blood poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins to all, says Jesus, who will drink this cup, who will make it theirs, who will rejoice in the precious blood.

Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

And for Barabbas, read your own name, because that's what Matthew's message is for you. Let's think about that as we approach this table that speaks of the precious blood of Jesus, and as we sing number 400.

■■■■ a morning, and as our blood of God.

[43 : 49] Ges