

The King is Rejected

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[0 : 00] Could I welcome everyone as we gather for this lunchtime Bible talk? If you're a regular, welcome, and if you're a newcomer, a particular welcome.

Now, we are continuing this series we began last week leading up to Easter called The King's Suffering and Glory in Matthew's Gospel, and we are going to be reading on page 834 of the Bibles. Last week, we looked at the betrayal in Gethsemane, and the first part of chapter 27 tells about how Jesus was taken to the chief priests, and they've decided to send him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor.

So let's read then on page 834, and we're going to read verses 11 to 26. Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, Are you the king of the Jews?

Jesus said, You have said so. But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate said to him, Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?

[1 : 13] But he gave him no answer, even to a single charge. So the governor was greatly amazed. Now at the feast, the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted.

And they had then a notable and notorious prisoner called Barabbas. So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus, who was called Christ.

What he knew was out of envy they had delivered him up. So each 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.

Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

The governor again said to them, Which of the two do you want me to release for you?

And they said, Barabbas. Pilate said to them, Then what shall I do with Jesus, who is called Christ? They all said, Let him be crucified.

[2 : 18] And he said, Why? What evil has he done? But they shouted all the more, Let him be crucified. So when Pilate saw he was gaining nothing, but rather 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. And all the people answered, His blood be on us and on our children. Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged, Jesus delivered him to be crucified.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Now let's pray. And God our Father, we have read this story, this story which is haunting, memorable, and terrifying.

Terrifying as we see the depths of our sinful human nature. Haunting as we realize that we were there when they crucified our Lord.

We have nothing to be proud of as we look at this scene. And so help us, Father, as we look at these verses together. I pray that your Spirit will take this passage and open it up to our hearts and minds.

[3 : 31] And lead us to Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen. A type of drama, I very often enjoy watching is courtroom drama. And a number of years ago, I was particularly fond of watching Kavanaugh QC.

I don't know if any of you have seen that. The Kavanaugh was played by the late John Thaw, possibly best known as Inspector Morse. And it was tremendously exciting drama.

Kavanaugh specialized in getting off innocent people. In saving people who had been framed, who had been lied about, and who were in court unfairly.

We read a passage like the one we've just read. But we realize that there is no Kavanaugh here.

This is this trial in its unfairness, in its prejudice, is going to continue.

And the result is going to be condemnation of the prisoner at the bar. And each gospel contributes its own perspective.

[4 : 38] But in Matthew, it's particularly the gospel of the King Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. The very beginning of the gospel, where is he that is born, King of the Jews, for we have come to worship him.

And all of this is building up the wider picture. This is the King who was to come. And the prophets long before, particularly Isaiah, had prophesied of a coming king who would reign over the earth. Isaiah had also prophesied of a suffering servant. And the disciples then, and ever since really, it's difficult to reconcile these two. Are they the same figure?

And if they are the same figure, how is a dead Messiah going to save the world? But here particularly, we are going to look at the trial under Pontius Pilate.

In the Apostles' Creed, the earliest Christian creed, we read the words, he suffered under Pontius Pilate. And there are three particular points I want to make. First of all, the king's silence.

[5 : 42] This is utterly perplexing. In verse 13, then Pilate said, Do you not hear how many things? They gave no answer, not even to a single charge.

Now, up to now, Jesus has continually answered his critics. When he has been accused by the leaders, by the Pharisees, he's had no difficulty in silencing them, no difficulty in showing up their hypocrisy.

But here, he remains totally silent before his accusers. Very strange, particularly in the gospel, it's so much devoted to Jesus' teaching, to Jesus' words.

Now, I think two points need to be made about the silence. First of all, he had already spoken. He has said, Are you the king of the Jews? Jesus said, You have said so.

This title, the king of the Jews, or the king of Israel, in many ways dominates this chapter. Jesus accepts the title. Notice he doesn't develop it now. He simply says, Yes, you've said it, and that is who I am.

[6 : 48] And if it doesn't convince you, in a sense, nothing will. And in Luke's account, when Jesus is sent to Herod, Jesus refuses to perform a miracle.

Herod wanted to see himself perform a miracle, and will believe you. And Jesus is silent. Jesus himself, the word made flesh, stands there silent.

But his silence is in itself a proof. In Isaiah 53, he was silent before his accusers. Now, if the chief priests had known their scriptures, and many of them did, they knew them very well.

Some of them almost knew them off by heart. But they did not realize that this was a fulfillment. They must have read the prophet. They were blind to his significance.

So, Jesus stands here, and there is this time, there is no word from God. Because Jesus has already revealed who he is. So, that's the first perplexing thing.

[7 : 51] We would wish, wouldn't we, that at that moment, he would have silenced his accusers by the eloquence with which he had so often silenced them in the past.

That he would make them look foolish, and they were obliged to let him go. But he is silent. And, of course, he is silent because he is taking our place.

We would have had nothing to say. He is bearing our sins. And when we stand under the weight of our sins, we have nothing to say.

And so, the sin bearer himself is silent. That's the first thing. Now, the second thing is the malice and hatred of the leaders. This was supposed to be an official trial.

But instead, we have boat rigging. We have prejudice. We have irrational hatred. Verse 17, Pilate said, Whom will you want me to release to you? Barabbas or Jesus?

[8 : 52] It's widely believed, actually, that Barabbas was also called Jesus, which was a common name in the first century. So, what Pilate is saying, which Jesus do you want?

Do you want Jesus Barabbas, the murderer, the gangster, the terrorist? Or do you want Jesus, the Messiah, Jesus, the Son of God, Jesus, the King?

Which Jesus do you want? We would think it wasn't much of a choice. But prejudice here is invincible. Verse 18, it was envy.

Pilate knew it was out of envy that he had delivered him up. Jesus had threatened their world of self-centeredness. Way back at the beginning of the story, at his public ministry, he spoke as one that had authority and not their own teachers.

They were totally jealous. This upstart from nowhere. He is being listened to, and we, the official teachers, are not being listened to. And envy is at the root of so much that is evil.

[9 : 55] Envy of them. Envy is something that eats away in our hearts, eats away at our personalities, and it creates a situation where we're no longer capable of recognizing the truth.

But it was also deceitful. Verse 20, the chief priests and elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas. You see, they didn't love Barabbas, of course.

Of course, they probably hated Barabbas. Barabbas was a gangster. They were part of the establishment. The crowd almost certainly did not hate Jesus.

This was the crowd who, after all, only a few days before it said, Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. But they allowed the leaders to intimidate them, to bully them.

And the other thing is, even in their rebellion and in the rejection of God's Messiah, they were fulfilling scripture. Isaiah, once again, they were people who were blinded and could not see the truth.

[11 : 05] Isaiah 9 says, people living in darkness have seen a great light. Well, instead, they had seen the great light and they chose darkness. But they were ultimately fulfilling God's purpose.

Now, C.S. Lewis said, we will all ultimately serve God's purpose. But it will make a difference, a world of difference, whether we serve him as Judas did or as John did.

And that's the choice that faces everyone today. So, there is the silence of the king who refuses to justify himself before them.

There's the malice of the leaders. And thirdly, there is the weakness of Pilate. Now, Pilate had been appointed by the Emperor Tiberius a few years before.

Being appointed governor of Judea was no plum job. It was rather like today being sent to the Welsh office or something when you wanted to become chancellor. It was a job you very often gave to people you felt you had to give a job to.

[12 : 12] And the best thing about it was you'd get rid of them. You wouldn't be anywhere near the court. Now, his governorship had mainly been distinguished by a mixture of weakness and intimidation.

Weak people very often are bullies. There had been various affronts to the Jews. He'd used the temple money to build an aqueduct. For example, in Luke 13, he had killed worshippers and mixed their own blood with the sacrifices.

Now, he had no love for Jesus. He was not for Jesus. He was against the Jewish leaders. And when Caiaphas came bursting into Pilate's presence with Jesus, you could imagine.

You could imagine the mutual dislike these two men had. Two more self-willed men than Pontius Pilate and Joseph Caiaphas. Never looked each other in the face.

But they sunk their mutual hatreds here. Now, Pilate evades responsibility and dodges responsibility.

[13 : 20] Let's say it's ironical. His is the only human name written into the creed suffered under Pontius Pilate. And he tries to evade Christ.

But he cannot evade Christ. Christ will come again and again and will refuse to be evaded. Matthew has a detail here which none of the other gospel writers have.

Verse 19. Besides, while Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, Have nothing to do with this righteous man, for I have suffered much today because of a dream.

Matthew had begun his gospels with dreams after all. The dream that Joseph had telling him that Mary's baby was actually conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Wise men had a dream warning them not to return through Jerusalem to Herod. Deep currents are flowing here, aren't they? And almost this is a voice from the world beyond.

[14 : 29] And after all, dreams, I mean, throughout scripture, dreams occur. Now, I'm not saying that they happen that way today.

We have the whole canon of scripture. Remember how Joseph had dreams, for example, which showed him what to do in Egypt. And I'm sure you've all heard these accounts of Muslims who have had dreams of Jesus appearing to them because that is the only way in which the gospel probably can reach them.

But here, this dream is a warning. A warning coming from the world beyond. A warning that Pilate is playing with fire.

Now, he knows Jesus is innocent. He knows the accusers are prejudiced and malevolent. And he does.

He does. Verse 24. Like Lady Macbeth, he washes his hands and imagines that washing his hands of blood will relieve him from guilt.

[15 : 34] Then he released for them Barabbas, having scourged Jesus. He delivered him to be crucified. He knows Jesus is innocent.

He knows that this is a prejudiced case. But instead of this, he lets Jesus go to the cross and tries to cover up the guilt.

History tells us that Pilate did not long escape Nemesis. After another slaughter, he was recalled by Tiberius to Rome.

But Tiberius died as Pilate was on his journey back to Rome. It's not certain what happened to him. But there are persistent rumors that Pilate committed suicide.

You see, we've been thinking of the day when Jesus stood before Pilate. Let's for a moment think of the day when Pilate will stand before Jesus.

[16 : 37] Because we do read again about him in Scripture. Not by name. Revelation 20. I saw the dead, great and small, stand before the throne.

Pontius Pilate will be there. Notice what Revelation says. Each person was judged according to what he had done. And those who were found written in the Lamb's Book of Life were saved.

There will be no corruption. No miscarriage of justice. No unjust verdict on that day. Pilate said. Now, of course, Pilate also fulfilled the Word of God.

Pilate. And sometimes people say, well, how could Pilate have done anything else? How could Judas have done anything else? The point is, both men had a choice to make.

And both men made the wrong choice. Both men chose. Judas chose wealth, power, and influence.

[17 : 41] Turned to dust and ashes within 24 hours. Pilate chose the easy way out. And that soon turned sour. The old hymn that says, what will you do with Jesus?

Neutral you cannot be. One day, your soul will be asking, what will he do with me? Amen. Let's pray.

Lord God, we tremble at this story. We tremble at the decisions made by Pilate and Judas and others.

And we pray that by your grace and by your mercy, that we may indeed choose Jesus, who is called the Christ, and take up our cross and follow him.

We ask this in his name. Amen. covid build a world ■■■thin lives. patreon.com Par fruitUDESelponel prev ma But really, through a germ gate, and hears llag Ab cup.

[18 : 47] You know what? confirm when you are Ori Chris, as a rival, a name Is it your brother? God I am able to help you out In you Josjailements Luke I am excited You Thank you Ph3