

Jesus Appears Before Pilate, Part 2

Scripture: John 18:28–38

Code: 43-104

We are studying the gospel of John and it is such a privilege for us, because we are focused on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, of course, He is the great theme of Scripture. I was thinking in just planning to preach to you this morning another message from the gospels about Christ that maybe I could kind of rise above this particular one and remind you of something that may for some people be a bit of a surprise, and it is this: the Bible is not about you. It's not about you. It's not a book designed to give you little methods and insights and helps to live your life. It's not designed to make you a better person. It's not designed for you to find in it those things that appeal to you and make you more successful.

The Bible is not about you and it's not about me. The Bible is about Jesus Christ. He is the theme of Scripture. He even said that the Law and the prophets and the holy writings were about Him. He said to the Jews, "Search the Scriptures, you'll find Me there." This is a book about Jesus Christ. In a simple sense, this is a biography of God, God revealing Himself in the Old Testament and fully revealing Himself in the New Testament in human form in the person of Christ.

It is no small disappointment to me that there are so many preachers who think the Bible is a book of how-tos to help people become what they want to be. It's not about you; it's about Him. And it only applies to you and it only has value to you as you find your life in Him, because apart from Him what is revealed in the Bible is irrelevant. And if you do not know Christ, if you do not possess Christ, if you do not live under His power, if your mind is not controlled by Him, by His Spirit, then whatever there is in the Bible that does apply to living life is beyond your grasp and beyond your understanding. The Bible is about Christ, and when you have come to understand the Christ of Scripture and embrace the Christ of Scripture, then all the truth of Scripture is made available to you through the Spirit of Christ, who takes up residence in you.

Again, it is no small disappointment to me that it seems so rare to hear preachers preaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. Most of the messages that I hear are assuming that the Bible is some how-to book for you to make your life something better. Just a reminder, the Bible is not about you; it's about Him. And if you're reading the Bible, don't be looking for you, be looking for Him. And when you fully understand Him and embrace Him as Lord and Savior, then He comes to dwell in you and bring to reality all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. They're all available only in Christ.

So as we come again to the eighteenth and nineteenth chapter of the gospel of John, the subject is the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we are again in this gospel looking at Christ. In particular, we have arrived at a point in John's history of Jesus where it is Friday morning. Friday morning of His crucifixion, the end of His passion week. It is the Passover of the Jews. It is, as far as we can calculate, the year 30 A.D., and Jesus is about to be crucified in just a few hours.

He came into the city on Monday. They hailed Him as the King of the Jews. The crowds were massive. They cried out "Hosanna" to Him, gave Him praise, declared Him to be the Messiah and

their King, the promised Son of David. But as the week went on and He turned His focus against the religious leaders of Israel and against their religion and against their destruction, as it were, of the temple of His Father, everything began to turn against Him. By Thursday night, He's isolated with the twelve in the upper room, dismisses Judas to betray Him, has that wonderful evening together with them, in which He unfolds to them His legacy, recorded in John 13-16.

Chapter 17, He prays for them on the way to the garden, gets to the garden sometime after midnight on Friday morning where he is arrested, and then He is hauled off to Annas, the father of the current high priest, who was the still high priest of power. There is a mock trial before Annas, then He's turned over to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court. They carry on an illegal trial in the middle of the night, and then to legitimize it they have a third phase at the immediate moment of daybreak, the morning of that Friday, where they confirm the sentence of death.

Those are the first three phases of His trial – Annas, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin – and then the second before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin at daybreak to legalize an illegal trial in the middle of the night. They want Jesus dead; that's their verdict. In order to get that done, they send Him to Pilate, and He begins the three phases of His trial in the civil court of Pilate the Roman judge and governor. As we come into chapter 18, and verse 28, as we saw last week, we come to this phase of His trial.

Now last time we looked at phase number one: Jesus' initial hearing before Pilate. Now the end of that hearing comes in verse 38 at the end of the verse. And after that initial hearing, the Jews presenting Jesus to Pilate as a criminal that has to be executed. Pilate's determination has given his verdict - at the end of verse 38, he says, "I find no guilt in Him. Not guilty. He's committed no crime that I can see." There have been no witnesses. There has been no testimony. There has been no evidence. But they're not done; they press the issue.

So we pick up the story in verse 39. Pilate says, "But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?" So they cried out again saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a robber." Verse 1 of chapter 19 says, "Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him."

Now we're in an obviously historic book giving us a narrative of the events of the trials of Jesus, leading up to His death and resurrection. It's not my intention to sermonize this, but merely to take you through the drama of this history with all the relevant data revealed in Scripture to help us understand it. There's no point in being in a hurry through this. We're not going to jump to some imaginary application of these things, but merely to understand the history that is recorded by John. Now, obviously, Matthew, Mark, and Luke also record the history of our Lord's crucifixion and the events leading up to it. Although we will not look in detail at those other accounts, we will insert references from them to help us understand the passage.

One thing has become extremely clear to us already and that is this: the Jewish leaders want Jesus executed. They want Him executed. Rome has the power of execution; that had been taken away from the Jews by the Romans. The Jews could not legally exact the death penalty, although they certainly didn't hesitate to do it to Stephen in the seventh chapter of Acts, a time after this. But now they're going to play by the law and by the rules. And why? Because Jesus said when He died He would be lifted up. When the Jews executed somebody they threw them down and stoned them to death. So without knowing what they were doing, they were pressing the Romans to execute Jesus to fulfill the very words of Jesus Himself, a prophecy that He would be lifted up. The Jews threw

people down.

Why didn't they do that? They did it with Stephen. Why didn't they do it with Him? The simple answer is they wanted Roman complicity from their viewpoint to somehow validate what they were doing before the crowds. But more importantly, they did what they did, pressing Rome to kill Him, because Jesus said He would be lifted up, and the Romans lifted up the victim on a cross when they executed them. They were really under the sovereign hand of God.

There is no question that the Jews were responsible for killing Jesus. I know that debate has raged for centuries. There have been people who argued the fact that the Jews did not kill Jesus. There's even a recent book that's come out trying to blame the Romans. But the testimony of Scripture is absolutely clear, and it is a repeated testimony – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the apostles, the reiterations in the book of Acts. There is no mistaking who killed Jesus. The Romans did the executing, but only to fulfill the demands of the Jews. Yes, the Romans were complicit in this. They were the actual executioners, and they joined in the mockery.

But you do remember that it was the Jewish leaders, according to Acts 13:28, who asked Pilate that Jesus be executed. One of the disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24 lamented the death of the Lord Jesus with these words: "The chief priests and our rulers delivered Jesus to the sentence of death and crucified Him." That disciple makes no reference to the Romans, but holds his own chief priests and rulers, the Sanhedrin, responsible for the death of Christ.

When the apostles began to preach about Christ after His death and resurrection, they made this same assignment of guilt to Israel. Peter's first sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2:22, "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." "You put Him to death. You nailed Him to a cross, though you used the hands of godless Romans."

Preaching his second sermon again in Jerusalem to the Jewish people, in the third chapter of Acts, we have the same message in verse 13, "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and put to death the Prince of life." This is an indictment of the populace of Jerusalem.

In the fourth chapter of the book of Acts, as Peter and John carry on the apostolic preaching, we read in verse 10, Peter says, "Let it be known to all of you and all the people of Israel, that by the name of Christ Jesus the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health." They had healed a man at the temple. Peter says, "It is by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified."

Preaching still in the fifth chapter of the book of Acts, and not backing off on this reality, verse 29, Peter and the apostles are speaking, and they say this in verse 30: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross." "You did that; you put Him to death."

Verse 31: “He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and the forgiveness of sins.” “You put Him to death, but He offers you forgiveness for repentance.”

Again preaching in the book of Acts it keeps going, this same affirmation of culpability into the tenth chapter, for example, verse 39. And, again, Peter is still preaching: “We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also” - the Jews in Jerusalem – “put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up.” There is no question who’s responsible.

Stephen - who was martyred in the seventh chapter of Acts after preaching the gospel - Stephen a deacon in the church in Jerusalem said the Sanhedrin was Christ’s betrayer and murderer (Acts 7:52), which is why they stoned him to death. They didn’t bother to find the Romans to execute Stephen. Their fury there overflowed, and they crushed his life out by heaping rocks on him.

But it isn’t just the apostles and the writers of the New Testament and Stephen that indicate the culpability of the Jews. Listen to the Jews’ own testimony (Matthew 27:25). They screamed, “His blood be on us and our children!” “His blood be on us and our children!” That is to say, “We take full responsibility for His death.”

The apostle Paul wrote these words in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, “The Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.”

Paul says they rejected the Messiah. They killed the Messiah the way they killed the prophets. “And now they’re killing us, the apostles, and trying to prevent us from preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. They are filling up the measure of their sins, and wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.” There’s little doubt in anybody’s mind that the Jewish people have suffered for centuries at the hands of God for the rejection of the Savior. They are still under God’s judgment. The Bible promises there is a time in the future when all Israel will be saved (Romans 11). And in the meantime, there are many Jews coming to faith in Christ, and there have been since Peter preached that first sermon on the Day of Pentecost. We don’t want to overlook that.

But the end of that great sermon Peter says, in Acts 2:36, “‘Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.’ And when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ Peter said, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off’ – the Gentiles as well – ‘as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself’...‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’ So then, those who had received his words were baptized; in that day there were added about three thousand souls.”

Three thousand Jews believed on the very day that Peter preached an indicting message. In chapter 3, where I was a moment ago, Peter calls for the Jews to repent, chapter 3, verse 19: “Repent; return.” And what was their response? Down into chapter 4: “Many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of men came to be about five thousand.”

Three thousand on the Day of Pentecost; five thousand men plus women on another day. In a few weeks there are thousands of Jews who have come to faith in Christ; and that continues all through human history. But there's no question about the clarity of the New Testament as to their responsibility for the death of the Son of God.

I was reading this week a contemporary rabbi, Jewish rabbi who's very anti-Christian, and he wrote this. I thought it was interesting, and I'm quoting him: "The New Testament unanimously casts Pilate as a thoughtful leader, hopelessly trying to reason with the lynch mob mentality of the Jewish crowd. The Jews, on the other hand, are consistently portrayed as blood-thirsty, maniacal, a debased rabble demanding that Jesus be put to death."

He goes on, "The benign character of Pilate, on the other hand, is one of a melancholy, weak leader who finally relents to the murderous demands of the Jews and reluctantly leads Jesus to be crucified. Pilate," he writes, "is extremely reluctant to execute Jesus, blaming the Jews for His death." And he has a final word: "All the gospels hold the Jews entirely accountable for the execution of Jesus," end quote.

That's what the New Testament says; there is no alternative history. But then the rabbi says, "Of course, the New Testament account is ludicrous, preposterous, erroneous, hateful, and anti-Jewish. So don't believe what the New Testament says. It is a twisted book connected to a long, dark history of hate that is Christianity, culminating and accusing the Jews of deicide."

It is what the New Testament says. He knows it's what the New Testament says. If you don't want to accept it, then you say the New Testament is a hateful lie. But, of course, the New Testament is the Word of God. It is true, and there is no alternative, legitimate history.

But listen carefully. The Jewish rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Jewish rejection of the Son of God, the Jewish rejection of their Messiah, is never an excuse to hate Jewish people. We must love them as God loves them, as Christ loves them, as the apostles loved them and preached the gospel to them. And we must do what Peter and John and the rest of the apostles did, and what Paul did, and what the New Testament does, and that is we must proclaim the gospel to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile. We must say with Paul, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and then the Gentile." And that's exactly what they did. Peter preached and the Jews turned to Christ by the thousands in the book of Acts.

There is no excuse for any anti-Jewish attitude. Remember the words of God to Abraham: "Whoever blesses Israel will be blessed; whoever curses Israel will be cursed." Doesn't mean you have to agree with them socially or politically, but God does have a plan for Jewish people. Even if He didn't, even if He didn't, God is no respecter of persons; and racism of any kind, in any direction, for any reason is sinful. I say this because there was a vast course of anti-Semitism that found its way into the life of the church early in its history. No place for that. The Jews are responsible. But immediately the apostles evangelized them, and they were *the* first believers to constitute the church.

More importantly, the death of Christ was not because of the Romans, in the first place. It was not because of the Jews in the first place. It was because of God. The true power behind the death of the

Son of God was neither Roman or Jewish. It wasn't Pilate. It wasn't Herod. It wasn't Caiaphas. It wasn't Annas. It wasn't the Sanhedrin. It was God Himself. It was God the Father, and the apostles also knew this and preached this the Day of Pentecost.

Back to Acts 2, verse 22: "Men of Israel" - Peter preaches, and then in verse 23 – "this man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men." There you have all the elements. By the predetermined plan of God Christ is delivered over to the Jews who have Him executed by the Romans; it's all there.

In the fourth chapter again, Peter is preaching in the book of Acts, verse 27: "Truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel," and everybody was involved in this. But, verse 28, "to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur."

Jesus was the Lamb of God - God's Lamb, God's chosen sacrifice. Isaiah 53:10 says, "The Lord [the Lord God] was pleased to crush Him." It pleased God to crush Christ. In fact, in the thirteenth chapter of the book of Acts, there's just a wonderful statement made. And now you've switched into the ministry of the apostle Paul.

But verse 28, speaking of the Jews, "And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed." And then verse 29, "When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead."

What were they doing? They were doing all that had been written about Him previously. In other words, the whole thing was prophesied, was predicted, both by the Old Testament prophets and by our Lord Himself. God made the plan; God said this is what's going to happen. It happened exactly the way the prophets said it would happen. It happened exactly the way Jesus said it would happen, and God's will was fulfilled through the rejection of the Jews and the hands of godless Gentiles. So if you want to lay ultimate responsibility anywhere, you can lay it on God, and you can do that with thanksgiving, because He died in our place.

Now one other thing to think about. Turn to Hebrews, chapter 4. You could almost ask anybody today this question: "If you had been in Jerusalem on the day that Jesus stood before Pilate, would you have screamed, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him'?" Would you have joined the rabble that sought His death? Ask somebody that, anybody: "Would you have done that? Is that how you feel about Jesus?" Knowing what you know, if that opportunity were given you again and He were to show up, would you scream for His execution?

I can't imagine anybody would say anything but, "Well, no. I don't have anything against Him. I would never do that. I can't condone that. I wouldn't do that. I don't feel that way." Well I've got news for you. In the sixth chapter of Hebrews, we have an identification of some people here who have been enlightened, verse 4. They "have tasted of the heavenly gift" of Christ and His heavenly power. They "have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit." They've seen the power of the Holy Spirit. And this is that group of Jewish people who were there when Christ was doing His miracles. They saw Him; they were enlightened; their minds were illuminated; they saw the power of the Holy Spirit working through Him; they "tasted the good word of God."

What does that mean? They got a sampling of the teaching of Christ. They saw the power that He displayed, which is “the power of the age to come,” and then they fell away. Many Jews rejected Him, even after that level of revelation. For them, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, because what is their crime? “They again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.”

Bottom line: Christ wasn’t just crucified once. He is crucified again in every heart that rejects Him. If you have rejected Christ you stand with the crucifiers and you say, “We will not have this man rule over us.” You say, “We have no god but Caesar.” You have another god; you have no interest in the lordship of Christ.

If that’s your attitude, if that’s your decision, you are among the crucifiers. There’s no middle ground. You’re either among those who embrace Him as Lord and Savior, or you’re with the crucifiers. If you continue in that attitude toward Christ you’ll spend eternity in hell with the crucifiers. So before you indict the Jews for what they did historically, look at your own heart. To reject Christ now is to again crucify Him. It’s de facto saying, “I have no interest in Him; put Him to death.”

Now with that, let’s go back to John 18. Clearly we’re going to see, as we go through the end here of chapter 18 and on through chapter 19, that the Jews are driving this whole operation, and Pilate is trapped in a way that he can’t get out of. He is, after all, an appointed Roman judge. He’s a procurator, a praetor, a governor, a judge. He not only has charge over the military, he has charge over the legal area - jurisprudence. And Pilate has had an initial hearing after the three Jewish phases of trial, and after his initial hearing in verse 38, he says, “Not guilty. I find no guilt in Him. There’s no crime.” And they’ve tried to intimidate Pilate. They’ve done everything they know, the Jewish leaders, to get him to say, “Guilty. I will execute Him.”

He isn’t going to do that at this point. “There’s no reason to execute this man. He has done nothing. You haven’t brought up a crime. All you’ve said is, ‘Why are you even questioning us?’” Pilate has no reason to execute Jesus, so he pronounces him not guilty in verse 38.

Now between verse 38 and 39, you don’t see anything obviously in your Bible but white space. But what happened in that white space is Pilate shipped Jesus over to Herod, who was close by in his palace in Jerusalem. So he sends Jesus to Herod, and that’s all recorded in Luke 23.

And for Herod, it’s just absolute idiocy. This is a foolish enterprise. He turns the hearing that he holds for Jesus into a complete comedy: mockery, scorn, ridicule. That’s recorded again in Luke 23 in the first part of the chapter. And after mocking and laughing at and scorning Jesus, Herod ships Him back to Pilate.

Pilate’s trying to get rid of Him. Already in chapter 18, verse 31, he said, “Why don’t you just take Him and kill Him? I give you,” in His case, “back the right of death. I give you back *ius gladii*, you can take His life. Just go do it.” And they wouldn’t do it.

And now he tries to get Herod to do something with Him and Herod won’t do it. He sends Him back. And so when we come to verse 39, this is the final phase, the third phase, and there He is back in front of Pilate. All Pilate wants to do is get out of this with some semblance of his own nobility. He

wants to get out of it in some just way, but the pressure is mounting in massive force.

Now as you come to this section, running all the way down into verse 16 of chapter 19, we're going to see three things unfold here - Pilate's failing proposals. He keeps coming up with proposals, ways that he could divest himself of this responsibility that he knows is wrong. So we'll look at Pilate's failing proposals – one of them this morning – then we'll look at Pilate's fatal panic. When his proposals aren't accepted there is a serious panic that sets in, and we finally come to his final pronouncement; but that'll be next time.

So let's look at his failing proposals and pick it up in verse 39. He knows Jesus is innocent. He knows the whole thing is a plot by the Jewish leaders to have Jesus murdered, and he knows it's out of envy. He knows it's just envy. Jesus is no criminal; He is no threat to Rome at all; He is no threat to the security of Jerusalem. But the Jews are a threat to Pilate's security. He can't afford another revolt. He can't afford the idea that he is going to resist Jewish pressure, because he's done that already three times in his history there, and all of them turned out very badly. And he was finally reported to Rome, and because he was so inept at ruling, his job was on the line - his future, his career. Tiberius, who was Caesar at the time, was very quick to remove and just as quick to execute inadequate leaders.

So his dilemma is clear. Rome wants fair and just rule. Rome wants the occupied people to have a certain amount of freedom within that rule. The Jews don't want fairness; they don't want justice. They want to execute an innocent man. Pilate doesn't want to do that, but he also doesn't want another revolt by the Jews or he knows it will be the end. His sense of Roman justice, you say, might have prevailed, and he could have said "Not guilty" and dismissed Jesus. He knew better than that; they would be right back at him.

There was no possible way they were going to settle for that. He is trapped. If he rules justly, according to the law of Rome and his own conscience, and lets Jesus go, it's just liable to get even worse. If he rules unjustly, then he has slain his conscience, violated his oath, and worse, sold himself to the Jews again by blackmail. There's got to be a way out.

He already tried one, back in chapter 18 as it said in 31, "Go kill Him." That didn't work. He tried another one, sent Him to Herod. That didn't work. Herod sent Him back after mocking Jesus; he sent Him back. Now he's declared Jesus innocent. What else can he do? Is there another proposal he can make? Is there another way out?

Mark 15 tells us that Pilate had developed a custom that he thought might ingratiate him in some ways to the Jews. Every year at the Passover, Mark 15 says, Pilate let a prisoner free. A prisoner of the Jewish people was set free. This was a gesture of Pilate; it's a good will gesture. And, of course, he gave the people the right to choose who that prisoner would be, and they would choose the least threatening prisoner. If they were going to turn a prisoner loose, it wouldn't be a murderous prisoner, it wouldn't be somebody who was going to do damage to them and maybe even take their life, it would be some benign prisoner, someone who had committed some kind of political crime against Rome or whatever.

So now the crowd is all outside the Praetorium, as you know. Pilate comes out. The crowd is growing and growing and growing, and he says, "Well, this might be," to himself, "this might be the

right time to fulfill that custom every year at the Passover, to let one prisoner go. Maybe this will be the option that gets me out.” So verse 39: “You have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?” And by the way, there’s some scorn and mockery in there. He doesn’t believe for a minute Jesus is the king of anything, and the Jews wouldn’t have Him as their king. So this is just loaded with irony, sarcasm, and scorn. “You want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” And in the scorn you can see that he really doesn’t believe this is going to work. “So they cried out again, saying, ‘Not this Man, but Barabbas.’ Now Barabbas was a robber.”

Pilate actually had brought the two of them out, and here is Jesus standing next to Barabbas. Now all of a sudden the lovely, perfect, righteous Son of God is connected to criminals, not just the two on either side at His crucifixion, but now He’s standing next to one. This is unjust association for Christ; He doesn’t belong with criminals. By implication He is treated as a criminal, like He was found guilty and should be released by the will of the people rather than the verdict of the judge.

Maybe Pilate thought, “This is the one they said ‘Hosanna’ to on Monday.” So he says, “You have the choice. Do you wish that I release to you the King of the Jews, your king?” Their reaction is predictable. “They cried out again... ‘Not this Man, but Barabbas.’ Now Barabbas was a robber.”

Little footnote – Mark 15:11 says, “The chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask for Barabbas.” “The chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask for Barabbas.” They’re driving this entire thing. Remember, they hated Jesus. They had hated Him since He started His ministry all the way to the end when He tore up their temple earlier that very week. And the mood of the mob can be swayed by the satanic leaders, so they begin to scream. As the crowd gets larger and larger, they scream for the release of the robber, the robber.

Who is this Barabbas? Who is he? Well, he’s not a petty thief. He’s *Ists* in the Greek, which means “a bandit, a bandit.” A *brigand* might be the Old English word. He is identified in Matthew 27 as a notorious criminal, a notorious prisoner. He is identified as a murderer in Luke 23, and in Mark 15, a murderer. It is even stated that he took part in some kind of insurrection, some kind of revolt that had resulted in people dying, being killed. So don’t think of him as some petty thief. He is a significant criminal who has murdered. Maybe he is a bandit like those that had infested the Jericho road, came out at night. Maybe he was part of the Zealots who wanted to rid Israel of the Romans, so they went around with swords and stabbed Romans like terrorists. He’s no petty criminal; he’s a man of great violence. He’s notorious for his violence.

His name is interesting: “Barabbas.” What does that mean? “Bar” means “son of.” “Abba” means - What? - “father.” So you have the son of the Father and the Son of the Father. You have the human son of the Father and the divine Son of the Father standing side-by-side. Which will you take? Amazing choice of names in divine providence. But they were earthy and worldly and temporal and godless. They had no interest in the Son of the Father in heaven. They only wanted the son of the Father on earth. It’s all twisted, totally twisted. That’s why Peter said in Acts, chapter 3, “You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you.” It may seem a long way away, this history, but you’re at that crossroads.

When they screamed “Barabbas,” Matthew 27:22 says, “Pilate said, ‘What then shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?’” That’s the most important question anybody will ever ask and answer. “What then shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?” And they screamed, “Crucify Him! Crucify

Him! Crucify Him!"

Pilate is sinking. He releases Barabbas to appease the Jews, but he still has Jesus on his hands, and now they're screaming, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" He has one more plan, one more idea. Chapter 19, verse 1, "Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him." We'll stop there.

What are you going to do with Jesus? Who do you want? Do you want the world or do you want heaven? Do you want the Son of the Father who is the Lord of lords and King of kings and only Savior by whom there is salvation, and in Him alone? Or are you earthbound? Do you want Barabbas or Jesus? You say, "I'd hate to have to make that decision." You do make it. Whoever you choose or whatever you choose against Christ is your Barabbas.

What will you do then with Jesus? If you've chosen "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life and the world"; if you've chosen to worship yourself; if you've chosen to believe in yourself, you've chosen Barabbas. What are you going to do with Christ? Peter said there is no salvation in any other name, than the name of Christ. What will you do with Him? That is the question. Most of you have answered that question by affirming Romans 10, "Confessing with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believing in your heart God raised Him from the dead." Confess Jesus as Lord and your sins are forgiven. Refuse to do that and you will forever be with the crucifiers. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we acknowledge again the power and clarity of Your Word; so thankful for it. Give us a clear vision of Christ. Give us clarity about our own lives and our own hearts, as we honor the One who gave His life for us. Amen.

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