

## The King's Conviction

Matthew 27:11-26

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Pastor Dean preached a very encouraging message on the power of hope last Sunday. As he mentioned in his message, we are in a very heavy section of Matthew's Gospel. Yet, it is good to immerse ourselves in the darkness Jesus endured for us. By immersing ourselves in Jesus' suffering under God's wrath we begin to grasp God's unimaginable love for us in Christ. This is what the Apostle Paul prayed for us to know in Ephesians 3:14-19 when he prayed:

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup> that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

So, as we move into this last section of Matthew, I want us to pray Paul's prayer. It is my prayer along with Paul's that we grow to comprehend with all the saints the breadth, length, height, and depth of the love of God in Christ for us.

As we begin, I hope we marvel and worship as we take into our hearts how Jesus fulfilled Scripture in His atonement for sinners. I want to remind you of what Matthew said about Jesus at the beginning of his gospel. In Matthew 1:21, the angel told Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife because the child that she was carrying:

*Will save his people from their sins.*

As we have journeyed through Matthew's Gospel, we have recounted the person and work of Jesus' ministry at a steady pace. However, since Matthew 26, the pace of the narrative has slowed considerably.

Just consider the pace of the narrative. In Matthew 26:1-5, we heard Jesus predicted His death and at the same time the religious leaders plotted to kill Him. Then, in Matthew 26:6-13, we saw a woman anoint Jesus before His burial. Next, in Matthew 26:14-16, Judas left the Passover meal to betray Jesus to the religious leaders. Then, in Matthew 26:17-35, Jesus had His final meal with His disciples and changed the Passover meal into the New Covenant meal of the Lord's Supper. After the meal, in Matthew 26:36-46, Jesus and His disciples made their way to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Here Jesus asked His Father if He must drink the cup and bear God's wrath in place of sinners. The Father's answer was "Yes," and Jesus submitted to the Father's will. As Jesus finished praying, Judas arrived with a band of soldiers and they arrested Him. Then, in Matthew 26:47-72, Jesus was taken to Caiaphas' house for a travesty of a trial where Jesus was convicted of blasphemy and insurrection. While the trial was going on, Peter was denying he knew Jesus. After that, in Matthew 27:1-10, Judas realized he had made a mistake and in hopelessness, he hanged himself.<sup>1</sup>

This slow pace of these events in Jesus' life allows us to marinate on how Jesus fulfilled Scripture. It allows us to meditate on the love of God in Christ for us. Again, it is good that we immerse ourselves in His atoning work

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Doriani, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Matthew*, 479.

on behalf of sinners. We don't need to breeze through Jesus' suffering and death. We need to slowly move through it and dissect it, learn to be stunned by it, and incorporate its message into our lives.

Isaiah prepared us to recognize and think deeply about Jesus' suffering and death, so that when it happened we would recognize it. Listen to what Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 53:3-7 concerning Jesus' atonement. Remember, he wrote this about 700 years before Christ's death:

*He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. <sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.*

We have referred to Isaiah's prophecy several times as we have come to Jesus' atonement. We will continue to come back to it as we journey to the cross. For in Isaiah 53, we see Jesus' suffering for our sins and earning our righteousness so that we may stand justified before our Holy God.

So, Matthew slows down his narrative as we get closer to the cross. He wants us to *feel* the agony of our Savior. He wants us to *identify* with Jesus' isolation and abandonment. He wants us to *feel* the injustice of the false accusations made against Him. He wants us to *stand* beside Jesus as He is silent before His accusers. He wants us to *see* ourselves in the religious leaders, the crowd, and in Pilate. He wants us to *understand* that the wrath of God that was being poured out on Jesus as He goes to the cross, and while He was on the cross. He wants us to *feel* the agony of our Savior and yet, *marvel* at the glory of God revealed in Jesus' death on the cross. He wants us to *know* what Jesus experienced as He fulfilled Scripture because of His love for His people.

Also, Matthew doesn't want us to approach the cross thinking that somehow this was an accident or a massive mistake or that God was somehow caught off guard. He leaves no room for us to believe that all of this could have been avoided. He wants us to know that God planned Jesus' suffering at the hands of sinners, His death on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead from the foundation of the world.

Now, with this in mind, let's work through our text. First, I want us to look back at vv. 1-2 of Matthew 27. This is where Matthew tells us Jesus has been taken to Pilate for trial, but then he breaks off and tells us about Judas' suicide and how it fulfilled Scripture. Then in v. 11, he returns to Jesus' trial.

Let's look at vv. 11-14, where Jesus stands before Pilate. This is actually the second time Jesus has stood before Pilate. Luke 23 tells us that Pilate discovered that Jesus was a Galilean, so he sent him to Herod because that was in Herod's jurisdiction. Herod didn't want to deal with Jesus so he sent him back to Pilate. Matthew didn't record the first time Jesus stood before Pilate.

By the time of the second trial, Pilate had some information on Jesus and the accusations that were being made against Him. He also understood His accusers were disingenuous. He knew they envied Jesus and wanted Him executed. Look at v. 11:

*Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You have said so."*

The religious leaders had already tried to sway Pilate to their opinion of Jesus. Their accusation was that Jesus was leading a rebellion by declaring Himself to be King. For Roman law, this would have been a capital offense and therefore He should be executed. So, Pilate asked Jesus,

*"Are you King of the Jews?"*

But, here's the deal: The English translation falls short of how it was said. In the original Greek, Pilate's question sounds more like one of disbelief,

*"You . . . King of the Jews? This is ridiculous!"*

Why would Pilate respond this way? It was because Jesus stood before Him looking like a beggar. He had been beaten, spit on, His clothes were torn and He was filthy because of how the religious leaders had been treating Him. Jesus looked more like a loser than a King. So, Pilate didn't believe Jesus when He said, *"You have said so,"* which means, *"Yes."*

The thing is: Early on in this trial Pilate believed Jesus was innocent. So, he attempted to set Jesus free. Pilate asked Jesus if he was the King of the Jews, and if Jesus had answered, *"No."* The trial would have been over. He could've gone free. But Jesus answered, *"Yes,"* and so the trial goes on.

To complicate matters, Jesus didn't defend Himself. He stood silent before His accusers. Look in vv. 12-14:

*But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer.<sup>13</sup> Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?"<sup>14</sup> But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.*

Pilate was shocked by Jesus' silence. Pilate had governed many trials. Most prisoners loudly proclaim their innocence, but Jesus didn't say anything. Charles Spurgeon comments:

*His silence astonished Pilate . . . Jesus answered nothing, for He was there as His people's representative and though He had not sinned, they were guilty [of sin] . . . He might have cleared himself of every accusation that was brought against him, but that would have left the load of guilt upon those whose place he came to take; so he answered never a word. Such silence was sublime."<sup>2</sup>*

So, just as Jesus stood silent before his accusers at his first trial, He does so again. He was innocent of all charges, yet he refused to defend himself. Why? Because He was being our substitute in order to pay for our sins.

Friends, Jesus willingly stood condemned so that by our faith in Jesus you and I could be set free. In our place He stood condemned so that we may be declared innocent.

What we are witnessing in this text is how Jesus begins to drink the cup of wrath for us. He is beginning to receive the curse of sin for us. He is on the front-end of being stricken, smitten, and afflicted by God. Our sins are being laid on Him.

Friends, we need to be delivered from sin's curse, because, if we died in that condition we would go to hell for all eternity and be under the fury of the wrath of Almighty God. But God, in His mercy came in Christ and took the curse of sin for us.

So, if you're not a Christian then you need to confess your sins to God and place your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. If you are a Christian, then you should worship because the only thing you brought to your salvation is your sin. Salvation is a gift from God to be received by the gift of grace through faith. Worship is the proper response to what Jesus has done for us.

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Spurgeon, The Gospel of the Kingdom: An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew, 536.

The next scene in Jesus' trial is in vv. 15-23 where the crowd chose Barabbas over Jesus. So, in vv. 11-14, we saw that Pilate asked Jesus two questions: "Are you the King of the Jews?" and "Do you hear how many things they testify against you?" Now, in vv. 15-23, we get four more questions from Pilate. Let's look at the next two vv. 15-21:

*Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted.<sup>16</sup> And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.<sup>17</sup> So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"<sup>18</sup> For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.<sup>19</sup> Besides, 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."<sup>20</sup> Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.<sup>21</sup> The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas."*

The second and third questions are the same. They are both about the release of Barabbas or Jesus.

So, Pilate saw through the motives of the religious leaders. He didn't believe Jesus was guilty of any crime. He tried to get Jesus released by allowing the crowd to choose Jesus through the Passover custom where the crowd may choose to have a prisoner released.

By the way, early Gospel manuscripts tell us that *Barabbas'* first name was *Jesus*. But, there's even more irony. The name *Barabbas* means "son of a father." So, here's the scene, standing side-by-side is *Jesus Barabbas* and *Jesus Christ*. The crowd is called to choose the right Jesus to release and have the other one crucified.

If they chose Barabbas, they would be choosing a well-known criminal. Verse 16 calls him *notorious*. So, he was not some run-of-the-mill kind of criminal. He was a convicted murderer and an insurrectionist. These crimes earned him a death sentence, which meant he was moments away from being executed on a cross.

However, when Pilate asked the crowd who they wanted released, *Jesus Barabbas or Jesus Christ*, he was hoping they would choose Jesus Christ, get him off the hook, and take him out from under all of this political pressure. But, the religious leaders had ginned (stirred) up the crowd to ask for the release of the wrong Jesus, Jesus Barabbas.

Let's make some application. Think about the crowd's choice between the two Jesuses. Their choice is a choice that is always before us as well. The thing is, we have far more than two Jesuses to choose from in our culture. We have more like two dozen versions of Jesus in our culture, so we must beware of the type of Jesus our culture creates and puts before us as a legitimate. We have the Jesus of popular authors like Anne Rice, Dan Brown, Rob Bell (*Love Wins*), or William P. Young (*The Shack*). We have the versions of Jesus of the world religions. Do you want the Jesus of Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism? There are the Jesuses of the cults and occult. Do you want the Jesus of Deepak Chopra, Joseph Smith, Jehovah's Witnesses, or Mary Baker Eddy? There is also the Jesus of pop culture. You will find versions of Jesus on the *Simpsons*, *South Park*, *Family Guy*, or some other wacked out show. There are the versions of Jesus made up by your favorite actor, politician, or celebrity preacher that has deconstructed his faith. There's the Jesus presented to us from the sports world or perhaps your favorite athletes. Do you want the Jesus of LeBron James or Steven A. Smith? There's the Jesus of the music industry, like Kanye West, Justin Bieber, or pick any country singer. Do you want the Jesus of Luke Combs or Morgan Wallen? Also, as we get closer to Easter, the History Channel always produces a version of their "so-called" historical Jesus.

Friends, the bottom line is: We can't just make up any Jesus we want. We must follow Jesus in the Bible because Jesus said Hell is real and He is the only way to Heaven. He said He was the Son of God who came to fulfill Scripture and die on the cross to pay for the sin of His people. He said He would rise from the dead and He did. This is the only true choice for a Savior.

One last observation. I want to consider Pilate's dilemma and the crowd's choice. Pilate wanted relief from the pressure he was under so instead of choosing Jesus Christ, he let the crowd make his choice. Likewise, we are often faced with the same kind of dilemma.

Here's what I mean: For many of us, the types of Jesuses I listed earlier are not even a temptation. However, for all of us, the choice is much more sinister because we are all constantly faced with choosing between types of functional saviors in our lives, aren't we? We are always choosing between some sin as a functional savior that promises a way out of suffering, takes the pressure off us, gives us relief, provides satisfaction, and the hope we long to have. We can't let the crowd make that choice for us. *We must choose to trust in the biblical Jesus as our Savior.* There is only one true Savior, Jesus Christ. Only Jesus Christ can provide salvation for us, so choose Him.

Let's keep moving through the text. In v. 19, Pilate's wife comes to him and tells him that she had suffered in a dream because of Jesus and that he should have nothing to do with Him. Pilate should have listened to his wife.

Instead of taking her advice to resolve his dilemma, he played the political game by asking two final questions. Look in vv. 21-23:

*The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." <sup>22</sup> Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" <sup>23</sup> And he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"*

Pilate's whole plan backfired on him. When Pilate asked the crowd to choose between Jesus and Barabbas, to his shock and dismay, they asked for Barabbas. Think about it, Jesus went around doing good, healing and teaching the people, but they chose Barabbas, an insurrectionist and a murderer. They chose a man of violence over a man of love.

Later, in Acts 3:13-15, when Peter preached his first sermon, he reminded the people of their choice. Peter said:

*The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. <sup>14</sup> But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, <sup>15</sup> and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it's easy to criticize the crowd here. However, before we condemn the crowd, we must examine our hearts and lives. The Apostle Peter is right. We killed the Author of Life.

But here is the worst part. We often keep making the same mistake the crowd did, and we do it over and over. We must consider the times in our lives when we have chosen someone or something over Jesus. How often have you done that? How often have you chosen your preferred sin over Jesus? You know the sin I am talking about. I don't have to give examples and make long lists for you. Here's the deal: You may not have cried, "*Crucify Him*" but you chose your favorite sin over Jesus and for that sin and many other sins He was crucified.

Friend, perhaps you're here and you're not a Christian. Pilate's question is appropriate for you, "*What will you do with Jesus who is called Christ?*" This question is not a new question. Matthew has been weaving this question throughout his gospel. We all must come to terms with who Jesus is and surrender our lives to Him alone. Have you done that? Will you do that? Let me encourage you to do that today.

The final scene in Pilate's court is in vv. 24-26. Here Pilate tries to absolve himself of any guilt for killing Jesus. Listen to them again:

*So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that 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."*

Pilate realized he was getting nowhere with the crowd, which was close to rioting. So, what did he do? Instead of declaring Jesus innocent, he declared himself innocent! He washed his hands before all of the people and said,

*"I am innocent of this man's blood."*

If only it were only that easy! If only we could make ourselves innocent simply by saying so. If only water could wash away your sins. It won't! Only the blood of Jesus can wash away your sins.

After Pilate declared himself innocent of Jesus' death, v. 25 says the people cried out:

*"His blood be on us and on our children!"*

Friends, in the past, this verse has been wrongly used to justify antisemitism. There have been those who wrongly believed that because the Jews killed Jesus and called this curse down on themselves that this justifies antisemitism. Nothing can be further from the truth.

Jesus died for sinners of all ethnicities, tribes, tongues, and colors. In other words, we have all sinned. It was our sin that put Jesus on the cross. We are all guilty.

Verse 26 concludes the scene with Barabbas being released and Jesus being delivered to the soldiers to be crucified.

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

When you think about this verse and Jesus' crucifixion, you should realize that three crosses were already prepared that day. Pilate had planned to crucify Barabbas and his two associates. But, what happened? The crowd wanted Barabbas released, which meant Jesus died in his place. Jesus took Barabbas' place on the cross.

Friends, just like we are the crowd who condemned Jesus, but we are also like Barabbas in that Jesus died in our place on the cross and for our sin. He was the only innocent One there that day and yet, He died under our sentence of death to pay our debt of sin.

This morning, as we are moving toward the cross, we see Jesus, the sinless Son of God, standing in our place condemned to die not for His sin but for our sin. Friends, may the height, length, breadth, and depth of the love of God sink deep into our hearts this morning and may we marvel at Jesus and worship Him.