

Have you ever read a story or scripture in the bible and heard of a character that sparked your interest but then you never really find anything more about them? There are several throughout the bible, think of just the ones in the crucifixion story. Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross for Jesus, what a sight that must have been. Jesus told the disciples that they would carry his cross too. What about the criminal who hung on the cross beside Jesus, a man who because of his life choices was sentenced to death but who receives forgiveness at the last minute. It doesn't work out that way for everyone, but this guy truly received God's favor that afternoon. Have you ever thought about the Roman centurion, one of the ones who supervised the execution, who watched and heard firsthand, as some people cried out for Him, and others made fun of this man who came only to save them. During the death of a man, he did not believe who Jesus said He was, then after it was over exclaims on behalf of the gentiles for generations to come, "surely this man was the son of God!"

The bible is full of these types of stories, we get a glimpse of someone then they are gone, and we hear nothing about them again. One day a little while back I watched a video and it hit me hard. I prayed about the topic in the video, and it stuck with me for weeks. Everything I heard, everything I watched pointed back to this very story. The story is about Jesus and Barabbas. Without giving away the whole story in just a few short sentences, Barabbas was not a savory character, I sure that when he woke this Friday morning, he was dreading the inevitable slow and horrible death that awaited him, for the choices that he had made. Which is exactly what he deserved, but something changed all that but what was it?

There was a man who was brought before the Roman governor to be tried. You may wonder why these spiritual leaders were taking Jesus to a Roman governor instead of dealing with him themselves.

Philo, the ancient Jewish scholar from Alexandria, described Pilate like this: "His corruption, his acts of insolence, his rapine, his habit of insulting people, his cruelty, his continual murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never-ending gratuitous and most grievous inhumanity." The Sanhedrin knew this was the right man to bring Jesus in front of for Him to receive the outcome they desired.

Pilate asks them why they don't try Him under their own law. The chief priests knew why they had brought Jesus to Pilate's headquarters, it was to have him put to death because their own Jewish law would not allow it. They told Pilate lies to further accuse Him, lies like Jesus was misleading the Israelites, and forbidding them to pay taxes to Caesar. The Sanhedrin didn't have any actual charges against Jesus so they were doing their best to bring charges that would show Jesus was a threat to Rome. This wasn't the first time they tried to trip Him up on the topic of taxes. In Matthew 22 the Pharisees tried to catch Him in His words and asked Him his opinion about paying taxes to Caesar. He called them hypocrites and asked them why were they trying to trap him? He saw right through their schemes, He asked them for a coin and whose image was on it, and whose inscription? When they replied that it was Caesar's, he told them to give back to Caesar what was Caesar's and give to God what was God's.

Another big accusation was that Jesus was claiming to be the Christ, a king. This would have threatened the power Rome held over the Israelites if Jesus was trying to overthrow Rome. This would have been considered treason, only the emperor could grant the title of King. The normal sentence for treason was death. The thing is His enemies were pretty close saying He was a king. Jesus did state that He is the

Messiah, but His plan was not to save them from the political constraints of Roman rule but rather spiritual salvation from their sin.

Please stand with me as we read the word of God. Pray

There are 3 things I want you to see in today's message. The Accusation, The Answer, The Aftermath

1. The Accusation

V11-14 So Pilate is the governor giving him power to be the prosecutor of all Judea, by this point he has been in this role for a few years and will hold it for a total of ten years at which time he will be removed for unnecessary brutality. He did not start off with a good impression either, when he was first given this position, he was not very understanding of the Jewish beliefs and customs. But the Sanhedrin planned to use this to their advantage.

They know Pilate will not prosecute Jesus for the reason they want him killed for so they come up with some things that they know will. Over in Luke we hear of the charges they bring up on Jesus. Pilate tried to get them to deal with Him themselves, but they know their laws won't allow it. These are some serious charges that the emperor will not stand for so Pilate must do his job.

Now as Jesus stands here in front of Pilate, I'm sure His attire did not appear to be that of a King, nor would standing shackled and on trial be a position for a king. Yet Pilate had to ask... Are you king of the Jews? This would have been a great time for Jesus to prove to them that He is who he says He is! I mean His words have knocked soldiers out, He has astounded religious leaders with His knowledge, but all He had to say was "you have said I am". Now in the book of John there is a lot more of the conversation between Pilate and Jesus recorded. Pilate takes Jesus into the palace and questions Him further where Jesus does talk to him and explain His position. In short telling Pilate that He was born to be all about the truth and that His kingdom is not of this world. Assuring Pilate that the Roman empire was not politically threatened by Jesus.

2. The Answer

When the chief priests and elders questioned Jesus about the charges, He had nothing to answer. Jesus knew that He was there on behalf of His people. Although He had not sinned those, he represented had committed all the charges brought upon Him. Knowing if He would have cleared Himself it would have left the load of our sins on us! SO, Jesus simply doesn't answer, if He were to admit that he is a king, Pilate would be obligated to execute Him. However, He really cannot deny the charge because He was born King of the Jews

Jesus' silence astonished Pilate as he was accustomed to those standing in front of him to say or do whatever they could to get out of the mess they were in. SO as Jesus stood silent Pilate did not know what to think, Jesus' last words to Pilate in the palace would be His last words until the cross.

3. The Aftermath

V15-18

This is the week of the Jewish festival of Passover, anyone and everyone traveled here to Jerusalem. In fact, Pilate was not from Jerusalem he was only here with his army to help keep the peace and ensure everything went smoothly. Pilate like most wicked men, was a great coward, so with this whole mess

about executing Jesus on some crazy cooked up charges he knew he had to come up with a creative way get out of this. He really wanted to deliver Christ from His cruel enemies, knowing that they had delivered Him out of envy. His plan was simple offer up choice that would most defiantly free Jesus. Especially given the option behind door #2.

This was a man who we do not fully know his charges, but other gospels record that this man is in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. It would seem that this man is a zealot who participated in a violent act against Rome, in hopes of driving out the roman soldiers. Doing what he thought was best for his people, this would have made him a hero to some but still a murderer to others.

V17 Pilate obviously wants to release Jesus, so he gives the crowd the choice, Jesus the Messiah or Jesus Barabbas. Assuming the masses would surely choose the Messiah over Barabbas. Ironic how they have two men named Jesus to choose from. Even more ironic is the name Barabbas actually means son of the father. Sometimes Rabbis are addressed as father so maybe Barabbas is the son of a prominent Rabbis, but Jesus the Messiah is the one true son of father. Barabbas strongly opposed Rome and the Jews hated Rome, so this man had some favor with Jewish people. Little did Pilate know that the chief priests had been persuading the crowd to choose Barabbas over the Messiah.

V19 As we have read through this passage have you seen anyone give testimony for Jesus? Surprisingly and sadly no one has spoken up on Jesus' behalf. Not the disciples, or Christ's followers when no one else dared to speak a word God raised up a stranger, a pagan, a woman to give evidence of His innocence.

This was an honorable testimony to our Lord Jesus, when his friends were afraid to appear in His defense, God made even those who were strangers and enemies to speak in His favor. Peter denied Him, Judas confessed Him, the chief priest pronounced Him guilty, Pilate's feelings that Jesus was innocent were confirmed by a message from his wife. This is defiantly a message from God to ensure Pilate does not go down the wrong path of sin and injustice. God has many ways to direct us in our sinful pursuits, be it a dream, a feeling or a message from unlikely person that we trust. It is wonderful how God works.

V20-23 It is often viewed that this is not the same crowd that welcomed Jesus into the City, not a crowd made up of those who knew Him but a crowd that the chief priests assembled so they could guarantee this vote would go their way. So, Jesus has been sold out for the price of a slave and now a robber, a murderer has found more favor with the people than Prince of peace.

Because of the crowd chose the way they did, in a situation were Barabbas deserved the punishment of death, He becomes symbolic of each and every one of us! Christ took your place that day. He was falsely accused of sins that I really am guilty of.

Do you remember there were two other men being crucified that day beside Jesus? Later in Matthew they are said to be rebels, or guerrillas the same as Barabbas was charged with. Their crucifixion indicates that they were guilty of more than just robbery. The fact that there were three crosses strongly suggests that Pilate had already ordered preparations to be made for the execution of these three rebels. If that was the case Jesus actually took Barabbas place on the cross.

V24-26 Pilate has lost all control of the crowd, they will not even answer his questions, they just keep shouting “crucify Him, crucify Him”. He doesn’t have any other options now the crowd is almost in riot form. All he can do now is try his best to show them that he doesn’t want anything to do with this decision. He tries to use a Jewish ritual of washing his hands to separate himself from the whole situation. Pilate is the only one in Jerusalem that can set Jesus free. His failure to do that in the face of popular opposition constitutes cowardice. It would be interesting to see how Pilate would judge a Roman soldier who displayed cowardice of this sort on the battlefield. In the Roman world, cowardice is a capital offense. By Roman standards, it is Pilate rather than Jesus who should die.

On Pilate's defense he is trying everything he can think of to change the mob's mind. By declaring his innocence, he is putting the blame on them, hoping this would make them realize they would be held accountable for Jesus' blood.

The crowd accepts responsibility and guilt. This does not make Pilate guiltless, but it does make the people guilty. Their willing acceptance suggests that they consider their actions blameless, they don't think they are doing anything wrong. Would you willingly saddle your children with this kind of guilt? NO! And neither would these people.

It is important to transfer as much of the responsibility as possible from Pilate to the Jewish leaders. Until now he has used the word crowd, but now he uses the word people a collective term used in the Gospel to refer to people as a whole. The people's response gives voice...that conviction to Israel as a whole have rejected its Messiah in a final and definitive way.

Finally, Pilate gives in to the angry crowd and returns Barabbas over to them and sends Jesus to be flogged. This is to be known as the worse punishment one could receive, leather straps made with lead or pieces of bone would be used to whip the prisoner. Most people would not survive this punishment and their lives would be taken there tied to post. This is the punishment Jesus took for you even before he was sent to the cross.

Barabbas is chosen over Jesus whenever the offer of salvation is rejected. This mad choice is made every day, when men prefer the lusts of their flesh before the lives of their souls.

Pilate's question, **“What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”** is a question that every human being must ask himself. Shall I accept Jesus' sacrifice, and proclaim Him Lord of my life? Or shall I mock Him, along with the riotous mob?

And are you trying to wash your hands in impotent water? It accomplishes nothing as far as innocence or guilt is concerned. Only the washing **“in the blood of the Lamb”** will affect the innocence and clear conscience that Pilate sought. Only clothing ourselves with Christ as we accept His sacrifice on our behalf will impart to us blamelessness in the eyes of God and allow us to bypass the punishment we so richly deserve.