

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Jesus Accused before Pilate, Part 1

Scripture: Luke 23:1-3

Code: 42-278

Well, it's a milestone for us today, we come to the twenty-third chapter of the gospel of Luke...Luke chapter 23. And that leaves us with only chapter 24 in this beloved history of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The twenty-third chapter of Luke opens with Jesus being taken to Pilate, the Roman governor by the Jewish leaders who desire the Romans to execute Jesus. The chapter begins this way, "Then the whole body of them arose and brought Him before Pilate. And they began to accuse Him, saying, 'We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.'"

For the moment, we can stop there.

We now meet another of the corrupt characters in the unfolding drama of the death of Christ. We add Pilate and we will soon add Herod to the list of Judas, Annas, Caiaphas and the entire Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of Israel. They are a Mosaic of tragic figures. All of them thought that they had the power or the influence to determine the destiny of Jesus, to render judgment on Jesus. They were wrong and that is the strange irony of this Mosaic. In reality, the destiny of Jesus had been determined by God. Jesus was never the victim of human decisions. He wasn't the victim of a corrupt disciple that betrayed Him. He wasn't the victim of a couple of corrupt High Priests who arraigned Him. He wasn't the victim of the Jewish Supreme Court who condemned Him. Nor was He the victim of Pilate and Herod who ultimately executed Him. He was God's chosen Lamb, and God had predetermined that He would die.

But nonetheless, this litany of corrupt and tragic characters play very particular roles in the murder of the Son of God. I guess the best way to understand it is, none of them really determined the destiny of Jesus but what they did with Jesus determined their own destiny. None of them really condemned Jesus, but each of them condemned himself.

In reality, it wasn't Jesus that was on trial, it was they who were on trial. And they all damned themselves. The story was told about a man who lived in Paris who had a stranger from the country coming to visit him. And wanting to show him the magnificence of Paris, he took him to the Louvre to see the great art and then he took him to a concert at the great symphony hall to hear the great symphony orchestra play. And at the end of the day, the comment of the stranger from the country was that he didn't particularly like either the art or the music. To which his host replied, "They aren't on trial, you are." The world has already judged the brilliance of that art and that music, you have

judged yourself.

That's what happened in the case of those who played their meager roles in the trials of Jesus. They all rendered a verdict of eternal condemnation on themselves. They were self-destructive.

In Matthew 27:22, Pilate, the Roman governor of Israel, asks this question, "What shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?" And while on the one hand he over-assumed his power, for he could not really do anything with Jesus by his own power and authority. On the other hand, the question is a legitimate question and it is a question that faces every human being. What will I do with Jesus who is called the Christ? You will answer that question, you are answering that question. You have answered that question. Your answer will have no effect on Jesus, it will have an eternal effect on you.

That's the irony that faced all these characters. They thought they were condemning Him. Ironically they were condemning themselves. And all of this unfolds in the continuing saga of our Lord's trials. Let me give you a brief review.

According to John 11:53, the Jewish leaders, all of them wanted Jesus dead...the Pharisees, the scribes and the Sadducees and the entire Jewish Supreme Court, the Sanhedrin all wanted Jesus dead. The final end had been determined...kill Jesus. They had to find a means to get to that already determined end.

First of all, they needed to be able to capture Jesus away from the crowds which means they needed to be able to capture Him at night but He disappeared at night. And, of course, He disappeared into the Mount of Olives in the thick Olive trees in the darkness, it would be nearly impossible to find Him among so many others there. And so they needed someone who knew where it was on the Mount of Olives He would go, and where He could be found. And that someone was Judas, the betrayer, the traitor. And for thirty pieces of silver, Judas agreed to lead them in the darkness of night to Jesus where they could arrest Him without commotion from the crowds.

It was after midnight following Thursday night's Passover celebration that Jesus had gone to the Mount of Olives to a particular place on the Mount of Olives, one of many gardens that were there called the Garden of Gethsemane which means olive press. He had gone there with His disciples as they did after each day's activities during that Passion Week. And this time, however, He had asked them to pray for Him because He was fighting a great battle of temptation. Instead of praying, they fell asleep. And Jesus went in, confronted the temptation, came out having sweat great drops of blood triumphant, nonetheless.

No sooner had He come back from this intense time of prayer victorious, then the crowd arrived led by Judas. They could have numbered as many as one thousand people, milling around in the olive trees in the darkness. They bound Jesus and took Him immediately to the house of Annas who had

previously been the High Priest. Since he stepped down, forced down by the Romans, it had been a series of sons and a son-in-law who took his place in the high priestly chair. However he was the real power behind that office. They took Jesus bound to Annas because they thought Annas being the most corrupt and the most experienced at conniving could come up with some crime for which they could get Jesus executed. He would be the chief criminal mind in Israel.

They dragged Him into the house of Annas and began a series of unjust violations of all laws of jurisprudence known to them. Annas could not come up with an indictment. He could not come up with a crime. He could not come up with anything to prosecute Jesus for. He could not succeed in a legitimate arraignment. And so he sent Him across the courtyard to the house of Caiaphas, his son-in-law. Caiaphas was convening with the Sanhedrin, over 70 men, the rulers of Israel, those who were the judges, the final court of appeals, the Supreme Court of Israel who had come to that great noble court because of proficiency of lower courts...these are the great paragons of justice in Israel. They convened to try to find a reason to kill Jesus and they bring in a parade of false witnesses that they bribe. But they can't get the false witnesses to lie and tell the same lie. So none of the stories agree and so it is fruitless.

So far they haven't come up with anything that they can sell to the Romans as a reason to kill Jesus. They revert to the one thing that was true about Jesus which they rejected that He did say He was the Messiah, and the Son of God, and that, they said, is blasphemy. And so, on the basis of the sin of blasphemy, they condemn Him to die. All of this between one and three A.M., a violation of every law of justice known to them.

There is to be a visible trial of Jesus to satisfy expected justice, but they can't do that until the sun comes up at about five o'clock. And so they hold Jesus in the darkness of the house of Caiaphas for two hours, from three to five. During that time He is mocked, He is spit on, He is punched with fists and He is repeatedly blasphemed. And when the members of the Sanhedrin tire of doing that to Him, they pass Him down to the temple police who follow their example and repeat the same indignities.

Finally sunrise comes at about five. All the illegal, unjust, corrupt perversion of justice has already been concluded. But to lay a veneer of legality over their evil injustice, the Sanhedrin convenes a very brief early meeting...very brief to publicly ratify the condemnation of Jesus. And it is that meeting that is discussed at the end of chapter 22 in Luke. Mark says it was early in the morning. Mark also says the whole Sanhedrin was there. Yes, all of them were there. Matthew says they passed the resolution to put Him to death. And they do it very rapidly, repeating just very briefly the scenario already done from one to three in the night.

Now they have a problem. They do not have the power to kill Jesus. In John 18:31 they say, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." They're going to pretend to be concerned about what they're permitted to do, the very selective approach to what was right, that was true, the Jews had no

right to kill. The Romans, the occupying Roman power only able to kill. They had kept to themselves what was called *ius gladii*(??), the right of the sword. They had taken it away from occupied Israel. The Talmud even notes this that some 40 years before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the leadership of Israel had lost the power to exercise the death penalty.

The first of the Roman governors in occupied Israel, a man named Caponius(?), it is said of him by Josephus that Caesar had instructed him that only the Romans had the right to take a life. So even secular sources indicate that this was true. Now, you say “Why didn’t they just kill Him like they did Stephen in Acts 7, when the Jews stoned Stephen to death in a rage against him. Why didn’t they do that?” That was illegal. That was mob violence. That was against Roman Law and they didn’t want to act as a violent mob in this situation. They were acting as a Supreme Court. The Jews that killed Stephen in Acts 7 were no court, they were just the populace who were there who cried against His blasphemy. Certainly the leaders of Israel were part and parcel to that, some of them. But this court wants to maintain the veneer of its jurisprudence. So they will not act like an illegal mob.

However, there’s another reason as well. Scripture predicted in Matthew 20 verses 18 and 19 that Jesus would be killed by Gentiles...not by an angry Jewish mob. The Old Testament in Psalm 22 describes the Son of God as being crucified in language that can only fulfill a crucifixion, not thrown down and crushed, but lifted up. And in John 18:32, Jesus said, “He would be lifted up,” a picture of crucifixion.

So the Romans for reasons laid in prophecy and for reasons in the mind of the Supreme Court of maintaining their own credibility, had to be executed in a legal fashion by the Romans themselves. Therefore the case had to go to Pilate because he was the Roman governor. He was in Jerusalem at the time because of Passover and that was where the potential problems would be with the massive swelling of the population during Passover season.

Now look at verse 1, “Then the whole body of them arose.” “The whole body” means the entire Sanhedrin. They were all there, the whole entire body of them. Mark also says, “The whole Sanhedrin.” This was a display of their supposed unanimity, as a display of justice. They couldn’t all be wrong, was what they were trying to say. It also is an indication of the breadth of the apostasy that dominated Israel even at its leadership level.

In an attempt to display the righteousness of their cause, they all come, all 70 of them show up bringing Jesus to Pilate. John says in John 18 that Jesus is bound. He has now been ridiculed, spit on, beaten and now He is still bound and taken by this entire body to Pilate.

Pilate has been the governor for a few years. He was the governor of Israel from 26 to 36 A.D. So he’s been in power a few years. He’ll be in power for a few years after Jesus dies. However, this act in itself is an utter disregard for justice. Remember what I told you a few weeks ago, according to Jewish law, when the Council rendered a verdict of guilty, they had to stay in their seats, they could

not dismiss from the court. The Council had to stay in that place, they had to remain there one full day so that during that day anyone who had any testimony to bring to indicate anything other than the verdict of condemnation, that is anyone who could show up with further evidence as to the innocence of the one condemned would have a full hearing in the court. They disregarded that as they had disregarded every other element of their own system.

After condemning Jesus, they immediately arose and left the court chamber. They should have stayed there, seated in their chamber through that entire day. And one could even make an argument, the next day until plenty of opportunity had been for testimony to come in, contrary to the decision. And then on the day in which the person was executed, they were to stay in their chambers until He was taken to execution and actually executed. They have no interest in justice at all.

So they all rise. Take Jesus bound and march Him to Pilate not far away. Now, before we get to Jesus and Pilate, there's somebody else that we have to find, somebody missing here. And we need to find him. Who is it? It is Judas. What happened to Judas?

Judas was dismissed on Thursday night. Went, worked the final aspects of his deal to betray Jesus, led the entourage of chief priests and elders and scribes and Pharisees into the Garden, along with the temple police and the Romans as well. He had done that and then he disappeared. The disciples have scattered. Peter has denied Christ three times already and is out weeping bitterly. But where is Judas?

Matthew gives us the story and it's very important to our understanding of what's going on here, Matthew 27. Let's turn to Matthew 27.

Now we know we're at the same time because Matthew begins chapter 27 with these two verses. "When morning had come, all the Chief Priests and elders of the people," again, all of them were there, "took Council against Jesus to put Him to death." That was their objective. That was their goal. That's the very brief morning meeting, the phony court for public view. And then, verse 2, "They bound Him and led Him away and delivered Him up to Pilate, the governor."

It is at this point that Judas reenters the scene. "Then...verse 3...when Judas who had betrayed Him saw that He had been condemned..." Stop there for a moment.

Judas is close to the action. He's close to the action. He couldn't escape and walk away. What he had done is so heinous, what he had done is so beyond any other sin ever committed by any other human being that he is drawn to the consequences of his deed. He can't pull away. And it is a horrendous and torturous experience for him to stay nearby, but he can't leave. He is compelled. And so, he follows the proceedings of Jesus probably through the night. He's certainly there in the morning when this veneer of legality takes place and the final condemnation is made public. He sees Jesus condemned. He's there. He sees Him now being led out of the council chambers by the whole

Council to Pilate for the purpose of execution.

Now they have come up with some crimes for Pilate. They can't go to Pilate and say, "Kill Him because of blasphemy," that's not a civil crime. Luke 23:2 says, "They began to accuse Him saying, 'We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar and saying that He Himself is Christ the King.'" They paint the portrait of Jesus as an insurrectionist, as a revolutionary, as a rival king to Caesar who is misleading the whole nation. That is, literally gathering the whole nation in an anti-Roman effort and telling them to stop paying taxes to Caesar and declaring Himself to be the King.

So they come up with this idea that Jesus is a threat to Roman power. Jesus is a threat to Caesar. He's a threat to *Pax Romana*, Roman peace because there's going to be an insurrection and He's leading it. This, they feel, will wake Pilate up. And I promise you, if that was true then Pilate would be duty bound to execute Jesus, to fulfill his responsibility. That's the very thing he was supposed to make sure didn't happen. So they crafted it right around what would be his primary duty.

Now Judas must have become aware of this, close enough to have heard this. And remember, it's a public trial. He's condemned. And somehow during or after that Council, they have come up with this idea that Jesus is a threat to Rome. And so Pilate is going to have a civil crime on which to judge Jesus. So it says in verse 3 then when Judas who had betrayed Him saw that He had been condemned, the Authorized Version of the King James says, "He repented." That's not a good translation. It's not the Greek verb *metanoew* which is the primary word in the New Testament for repentance used in the gospel, in Acts, in the epistles. It is the word *metamelomai* and the NAS has it right. It is the word remorse or regret.

He felt remorse. He felt regret. He sees Jesus unjustly condemned, going to an excruciating, ignominious, public, horrendous, painful death on a cross. And the whole scene is more than his ugly sorted soul can handle. Yes his conscience is crippled. Yes his heart is avaricious. Yes his mind is greedy. But he cannot escape guilt. The pain is excruciating, it is agonizing. It tortures him, it paralyzes him. He is thrashed by the enormity of his crime.

In a sense, there's some good news in this. It is good to know that a man as vile as this man of whom Jesus said, "He is a devil," and about whom Jesus said, "Satan entered into him," he is a Satan-possessed devilish man, it is good to know that this one who can sin against pure light, who can sin against pure love, who can sin at a level that no other man before or since has ever sinned or will ever sin, that this man as wretched as he is, who would sell the Son of God for money, this man who is so consumed with self-fulfillment, so wretched, cannot escape his own conscience. How powerful is conscience? It overrules Satan. It overrules evil at its worst. Even the devil and his demons and sin at its apex cannot cancel the warning system God plants in the soul of man. This is a gift from God to stop the sinner in his tracks no matter how wretched he is. And Judas is hammered by his conscience, hammered by guilt.

And so he felt remorse. That's not repentance, that's remorse. He feels regret and it's continuous here. He begins to feel remorse and it accumulates and it mounts. He feels sorry for what he did. Please notice this. It is not the sorrow that comes from the fear of man. It's not sorrow because he's worried about what people are going to think. It's not that. He knows the people will think well because they want Him dead. It is not the sorrow that comes from the fear of God, worrying about what God might do to him. That's not what he's experiencing. It is not the pain and the anguish and the agony of a dreading personal consequences. It is just the sheer torture of a conscience gone mad over a deed that is so evil. It is just the inherent wrongness, the inherent essential evil in the betrayal that brings about this horrible anguish. Apart from consequences, he's not thinking about consequences because he perpetrates on himself the worst of consequences as a way out of what is worse than any consequences, and that is the sheer torture of guilt.

Whatever he was feeling through the night that kept him close was intensified to an explosive level when he saw Jesus condemned. His soul was cut deeply. His reasoning mind flung loose and now it was assaulted by the stinging darts of a conscience that desperately attacked him and condemned him and devastated him for this horrendous treatment of the perfectly pure and holy Son of God. He was feeling pure pain over the horror of his sin. He was sorry that he ever did it.

He was not a believer, never was a believer in Jesus Christ as Messiah and God, if he ever cared about Messiah or God. He is, for all intents and purposes, a practical atheist. He is a materialist. He doesn't care about the deity of Jesus, if that is even an issue to him. In fact, when he died, Jesus said he went to his own place, the place for people who want to be away from God, a place for people who have no consideration of God in their life. If he ever had a theological thought, if he ever had a thought about believing in God, or believing in Christ as God, it never does appear. He is an unbeliever. This is not a believer who is now repenting to get back with the Lord, this is a man who was never a believer, who was a devil, Satan-possessed who went to his own place, the place that he should have been because it's the place for people who want nothing to do with God and it's called hell.

He is suffering sheer agony of guilt. It could have become true repentance, it never did. It is not what Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 7, "Godly sorrow that leads to repentance," it's not that. It's the sorrow of guilt that leads to suicide. But there's a path before he gets to that. He is so tortured, he thinks, "Maybe if I undo what I've done," so it says in verse 3, "He returned the 30 pieces of silver to the Chief Priest and elders."

So get the picture. They've just made their condemnation, he sees it. They've just crafted their accusation against Pilate, he hears it. Maybe it was already approaching Pilate's pretorium when Jesus...when Judas approaches the Council and says, "Here's your money back." The Chief Priests and the elders are, in fact, the Sanhedrin.

Why is he giving it back? Verse 4, saying, "I've sinned by betraying innocent blood." You know, a sinner can be so tortured by his sin that he can get no relief, have Jesus a few feet away and make a straight line for hell. That's what Judas did...that's what Judas did.

But there's something else working here. Judas had been part of the scheme to kill Jesus. He was one with all the liars who trumped up the false charges. He was then a false witness in every sense by complicity, aiding and abetting in every sin. I think Judas knew his role. He comes back and says, "This man is innocent." What did I just tell you? That Council should have been in their chambers, right? They should never have left. They should have been there all day and Judas would have gone into their chambers in the legal format and said, "I am here to fulfill the opportunity that this court gives to me to speak in behalf of the innocence of Jesus. I have sinned against innocent blood." But they disbanded and fled and so Judas, in a sense, has to go find the court. Judas is acting in a fashion consistent with legality and they are not. And he goes to them and says, "As a token of my commitment to His absolute innocence of what you're charging Him with, I will give you all the money back."

And there was something else. If you lied in a case, in a capital case, what was your punishment as a false witness? Death. I think Judas would be saying to them, "Kill me, don't kill Him. Please kill me. I can't live with this guilt." Filled with Satan, controlled by Satan, his conscience screaming at him, guilt setting off warnings like sirens in his head, he goes back, "Take your money, change your verdict, kill me, if you must."

How bizarre is this? How ironic is this, that Judas who starts it all by aiding and abetting the liars and the killers becomes a witness to the innocence of Christ? A witness to the innocence of Christ. This is their lead witness, this is their betrayer.

And they responded this way, verse 4, "What is that to us?" Oh! "What is that to us? You're the High Priest. You're the leaders of Israel. You're the Supreme Court. What do you mean, what is that to us? It's everything to you. Aren't you concerned about justice? We don't have any interest in your money, see to it yourself."

They have no interest in justice. They have no interest in truth. They do not want to consider for one split second that Jesus might be innocent of the crime that they are accusing Him of before Pilate. And by the way, Matthew writing this 30 years later could be calling for the impeachment of the Supreme Court of Israel. Certainly when you put the gospels together, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and you see the horrendous injustice, all four gospel writers are calling for the impeachment of Israel's Supreme Court by virtue of the way they treated Jesus. But it would be enough to impeach them for not listening to the testimony of Judas.

But, they're not interested in innocence and they're not interested in Judas. They don't care if he's tortured. They don't care if he feels guilty. Remember now, Matthew 23 describes them, "They bind heavy burdens on people and never relieve them." They produce sons of hell. They're hypocrites. They devour widows' houses. They abuse people. They have no compassion, they have no sympathy. They have no concern, no care. They weren't about to listen to Judas. They weren't about to execute Judas. And they weren't about to sympathize with him. They could care less. He was maybe trying to have them get him executed so that he could have some release from his pain.

A good picture here of the world's inability to give the sinner any relief. When guilt screams, the world has no relief. It will not offer you a way back. You can't say, "Well I'm sorry I did it, let's undo it. I'm sorry about all that, that produces the guilt, can't I undo all that? Can't we make another verdict about Jesus? Can't you take your money back? Can't you show me a little sympathy?"

The world has no interest in the sinner's pain. The world has no way to redo the past. The world provides no relief at all. And these leaders of false religion in Judaism were stone-hearted, God-rejecters who had no concern for anybody but themselves.

But, you know, when you think about the testimony of Judas, it's so powerful. Put yourself in Judas' position. You're feeling this pain, this excruciating agonizing torture of what you've done. Desperately what you're going to do is run your mind back over the last three years with Jesus. And you're going to look for just one thing that He did that was wrong, one thing that was inappropriate, one thing that was evil, one thought, one word, one thing He said, one thing that He did, one oversight, one mistake, one error, one failure to be wise, one wrong prophecy, just one thing evil, one thing wrong so you could justify and rationalize your betrayal. And all you do by running back over three years is intensify it because there aren't any such things. They don't exist.

So the torture is deeper by the memory. The testimony of Judas who said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood," is huge. An eyewitness for three years. "What is that to us? We couldn't care less about you or your testimony. See to it yourself, do what you want with the money. Verse 5 says what he did. "He went to the temple and threw the pieces of silver into the sanctuary..." and we'll stop there for a second. Sanctuary is *naos* in the Greek, it means the holy place...*hierosis* the whole temple with the courtyards and things. This is the holy place. There was a holy place and then the Holy of Holies. Into the holy place, only the priests could go. He wants to spite these priests who won't take his money. He could have gone back and put it in the temple treasury, the little receptacles in the Court of the Women, could have put it in there. That's where it came from. Yeah, they paid him money out of the temple treasury. He could have put it back into the temple treasury. He wasn't concerned about that. He wasn't concerned about the ethics of that. He wasn't concerned about some philanthropic act. All he wanted to do was spite the priests. And so he threw the money inside the holy place where they alone could go so they would have to process that...pick it up and

deal with it. This is anger. This is resentment. This is spite. This is vengeance.

He didn't have any worthy cause in mind. He wanted to force them to suffer like he was suffering. It didn't work...didn't work. So verse 5 says, "He departed, went away and hanged himself." How bad is the guilt when death is the only relief? You think of what is hell, hell is where your conscience is fully informed, fully released to accuse you forever. So he hanged himself and it got worse eternally.

What a sad, sad ending to one with such unique spiritual opportunity. By the way, in the first chapter of Acts and verse 18, it says that when he hanged himself, he fell headlong, burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. When he tried to hang himself, he either didn't tie a good knot, didn't pick a good branch and he fell over the precipice where he intended to hang himself and either before he had died, or after, his body was smashed on the rocks and burst open. What a horrible, horrible ending. Only Judas and Ahithophel in Scripture killed themselves by hanging, cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree says Deuteronomy 21, such a cursed way to die. But the remorse was so profound, it wasn't repentance, he didn't go to find forgiveness, he went to hell thinking he was finding relief.

And, of course, you know what happened. In verse 6 of Matthew 27, "The chief priest took the pieces of silver and said, 'It's not lawful to put them into the temple treasury since it is the price of blood.'" Oh really...now we're going to get lawful. It's not lawful. Remember, folks, it's daytime now and people are around and you've got to play the game. So they bought a field. Then Matthew says, "This potter's field to this day is called the Field of Blood." That would have been 30 years later when Matthew was writing. And it actually fulfilled prophecy. It fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. The prophecy is actually in Zechariah chapter 11, but Matthew attributes it to Jeremiah because the prophets, the book of all the prophets began with Jeremiah. So they often referred to the prophecies as the Jeremiah...even though it was actually in the prophet Zechariah. It was a part of all the books which began with Jeremiah. They bought the field, to this day Matthew says, that is to be remembered as the field of blood...blood money. That field, by the way, probably down in the Valley of Hinnom, down the backside south from the city of Jerusalem.

So, Judas comes to a horrendous end. And Jesus stands now, Luke 23, before Pilate and they began to accuse Him, verse 2. This is a fascinating, fascinating meeting. And if you want to know about it, you have to come next Sunday. I'll promise you, I'll be here cause I don't want to miss this. Let's pray.

Lord, it's an overwhelming thing to contemplate the life of this tragic person, Judas. It's just beyond comprehension that someone can be so close for so long, experience this kind of guilt and not go to the one who would freely forgive. There's just a list of sad tragic figures here. This mosaic of characters who fall into the irony of thinking they were judging Jesus when in fact they were judging themselves are all a good reminder to us who must face the same question that Pilate pose, "What shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?" For what we will do will have no effect on Him, but it has an eternal effect on us. We pray that there's no Annas here, no Caiaphas, no Sanhedrin

members here, no Judas, no Pilate, no Herod who render the wrong decision concerning Christ. I pray, Lord, that there's no sinner here plagued by the relentless pounding of guilt that will flee to death as if it were safety, or flee into the past, try to undo what's been done, but rather that the sinner would flee alone to Christ, for therein is forgiveness, full and free as pictured in the loving father who embraces the wretched prodigal. I pray, Lord, that salvation might come to the heart of one who has to this point felt the pain of sin and the pain of guilt without the release of forgiveness. We know You forgive all who come to you and repent. And we pray to that end for Your glory. Amen.

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