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

The Final Verdict from the Fickle Judge, Part 1
Scripture: Luke 23:13-25
Code: 42-281

We now come to the Word of God and our lesson for today from the twenty-third chapter of the gospel of Luke. If you will open the precious Word of God to Luke chapter 23, I'll read the portion of Scripture from verse 13 through verse 25...Luke 23:13 through 25.

"And Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people and said to them, 'You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion. And behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us. And behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. I will therefore punish Him and release Him.' Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner. But they cried out all together saying, 'Away with this man and release for us Barabbas!' He was one who had been thrown into prison for a certain insurrection made in the city and for murder. And Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again. But they kept on calling out saying, 'Crucify, crucify Him.' And he said to them the third time, 'Why? What evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt demanding death. I will therefore punish Him and release Him.' But they were insistent with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices began to prevail and Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand should be granted. And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will."

And so ends the day of trials of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the sixth and final phase of the illegal and unjust trials of the Lord Jesus. As we have seen, these six phases are divided into two parts, the first three make up the Jewish trial, the trial before the Jewish leaders. The first phase, an effort at indicting Him before Annas, the real religious power in Israel, the former high priest. The second phase before Caiaphas, the current high priest and the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel, this in the middle of the night in clandestine fashion. And the third Jewish phase, right after dawn in the morning to make it look legal, again before Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court. Annas, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin, and then Annas...and then Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin a third time. Three phases, this is the religious trial out of which they decided that the crime Jesus committed was blasphemy against God for claiming to be the Messiah and claiming as well to be the Son of God.
Since they had no right to exercise capital punishment under the power and authority of Rome, they wanted the Romans to execute Jesus. They might have acted like a mob and killed Him on the spot, but the Jewish leaders didn't want the responsibility for executing Jesus, they didn't want His blood, if

you will, on their hands in one sense, though later they cry His blood be on us. They wanted to avoid the deed itself, if they could. So they wanted to elicit the Romans to execute Him on a cross. However, the crime of blasphemy would not be a crime for which the Romans would call for capital punishment. They had to invent a crime and they did that on the way to Pilate's praetorium, that is indicated in verse 2 of chapter 23, "Whey they arrived, they said this to Pilate, 'This is the whole Jewish supreme court, the Sanhedrin, numbering about 70 men. We found this man...meaning Jesus...misleading our nation,'" that is, misleading the people of this nation to a revolution against Rome... "'And forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.'"

They form this supposed crime in such a way as to make Jesus seem to be a revolutionary who is a serious threat to Rome, knowing that for this crime the Romans would call for capital punishment.

As we have seen already, Pilate listens to them, meets with Jesus and concludes He is not guilty of such a crime. However, Pilate is going to have to make that decision one more time because the Jews, as we read, are very, very persistent. They want Jesus dead. They want Him executed by the Romans.

Every way you look at the series of trials before Annas, Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, twice, then before Pilate, then before Herod and now back to Pilate, it is nothing but wickedness and injustice that dominates the scene.

We have also noted in all of our discussions regarding the trials of our Lord that there is a dominating irony in it all. The one whom men judge is the judge of all men. The one whom men condemn is the one who will eternally condemn them. The perfectly righteous, sinless and innocent one is condemned as if He were a blasphemer and a criminal. The one who pleased holy God always, does not please men at all. Men seek to kill the very one who gives them life. The Lord Jesus is declared a blasphemer, declaring to be who He truly is, making His accusers the real blasphemers.

The Lord Jesus is declared not guilty repeatedly by three separate witnesses, Pilate, Herod and Pilate's wife. Yet in spite of repeatedly being declared not guilty, He is condemned to capital death as if He were guilty...irony after irony after irony. And all the wicked participants who sit in judgment on Him and who condemn Him, do nothing by their condemnation to determine His destiny which has already been determined by God but they do determine their own destiny, in a sense. They don't judge Him but they do judge themselves. They don't condemn Him, they do condemn themselves. The human haters of Jesus, Judas, Annas, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, Herod, Pilate and the screaming mob, do not determine the fate of Jesus by their decision, but they do determine their own fate. They condemn themselves, not Him.
In the section that I just read to you, you have the final phase of our Lord's trial. It ends with Pilate's final disposition at the end of verse 25, "He delivered Jesus to their will." Their will was that He be crucified. That's where the trials ended up.

Pilate, what a pathetic figure. He stands with all the other tragic characters who play roles in the trials of our Lord. And their tragedy is a monumental kind of tragedy because they were all in the presence of the Son of God, they were in the presence of the Creator, the one who made everything and without Him was not anything made that was made. They were in the presence of the Lord and Savior, the Messiah, the Redeemer, the only hope of sinners. They had the opportunity to ask Him questions, to get answers. This is the most monumental opportunity that any human being could ever have, to have a moment personally face-to-face with the Son of the living God, the Creator of the universe and the Redeemer of sinners. And Judas and Annas and Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin and Herod and Pilate wasted that unparalleled opportunity.

Thus, they're at the top of the list of human tragedies...at the top of the list, Pilate could be singled out. What about this man? What do we know about him?

Well, he's a historical person. He really lived, so says Tacitus, so says Philo, and Josephus, ancient historians. It was 1961 when their histories were validated. In 1961 some archaeologists were digging in the amphitheater at Caesarea, an amphitheater, by the way, that still stands in its remains where I've preached a few times. They were digging in that amphitheater where they have for years and years, dug around the city of Caesarea which was the Roman occupying capital in Judea. And they came across a large block of stone and on that stone were carved the words, "Tiberius Caesar," the name of the Caesar who reigned in Rome at the time of our Lord's death.

Also on that same stone was a reference to Pilate, the prefect of Judea who was the governor of Judea at the time of Tiberius Caesar from the year 26 to 36 A.D. Thus validating the existence of Pilate. To this day, that archeological find, that stone is called The Pilate Stone. Pilate on the stone is called prefect. He is also referred to in Scripture as governor. He has been called a procurator, all terms to describe his rule and his position and official status representing the Roman government as the sovereign over the land of Israel.

He had three primary functions. Command the military, that was number one and the Romans were well skilled in military warfare, as we all understand, that's how they conquered the world. He would have been a formidable soldier. He would have moved his way up the ranks, proving himself as a military man of great leadership ability.

Secondly, he had the responsibility for the collection of taxes throughout the land of Israel to be sent to Rome in order that the Roman presence there might be funded. He had to have his hand on economics and he had to be able to organize the taxation of Israel and pull it off. He had to be an administrator as well as a soldier.
And then, thirdly, he had to sit on a throne, a sit of judgment, and judge in cases that came before him that had implications for the Roman government. He was a general in the army. He was the

administrator of the tax system of the Romans in Israel. And he was the supreme judge on behalf of Rome.

Governors had so much power that until 41 A.D. historians tell us that no high priest could take the position in Israel without the approval of the governor. So Pilate had approved Caiaphas. He had great power. For that, the Jews hated him. For that, the Jews despised him, that a pagan, Roman, occupying general who was nothing but a blight and a curse on their land because he was a Gentile, should sit in any kind of place of authority over a high priest in Israel was unthinkable to them. The Jews hated Pilate the way they hated Herod for his self-promoting complicity with Rome. And yet the leaders of Israel had learned to compromise the throne to keep their own positions. Pilate was a hated man and he hated the Jews in return.

He must have had some great strengths. He must have had some great qualifications. He must have been a man of military power, prowess and accomplishment. He must have been a man of administrative ability, must have been a man of wisdom and jurisprudence who could make sound judgments or they never would have put him in such a very, very important position. But all we see about Pilate in the New Testament is how pathetic he is. He makes a noble effort at being a just judge, we'll give him credit for that. Three times he declares Jesus not guilty...verse 4 of chapter 23, "I find not guilt in this man;" verse 14, "I have found no guilt in this man;" verse 22, "I have found in Him no guilt." And then he even says in verse 15 that Herod found the same thing. Herod sent Him back to us because there was nothing deserving of death that had been done by him.

He makes a noble effort at being a just judge. And he would never have been in this position if he wasn't a good soldier, a good administrator and a good judge. He tries, but he's under tremendous pressure...pressure to do what is unjust, illegitimate, illegal, brutal, criminal to Jesus. He's being pressured by the Jewish leaders and eventually by the whole populace gathered around the Jewish leaders to send Jesus to a cross. He tried to avoid it at first. When they arrived he said, "Well why don't you just take Him and kill Him yourself? Do what you want with Him, I'll turn my head the other way for this one moment, I'll give you the right to capital punishment, do with Him whatever you want." They didn't want His blood, however, on their hands publicly, they were afraid of the responses of the people. I think they were actually afraid themselves to handle Jesus. For the moment, they wanted the Romans to do it, although later they were eager to say His blood be on us. In other words, trying to get a little bit of pressure off the Romans so they wouldn't feel so bad for doing this illegal thing.

He even tried to send Jesus to Herod, maybe thinking that Herod might dispose of Him for him. And then he offered Barabbas as an alternative. And then he decided, well, I'll scourge Him and maybe if you see Him beaten and bloodied, that will satiate your blood thirst and that would be enough for you.

Nothing worked, however, and everything he tried only mounted their hostility, only made them more angry, it was like pouring gas on a fire, the flames burned all the more high. The crowd became more blood-thirsty, more infuriated the more ways Pilate tried to get out of it.
Now as we follow the story a little bit, we'll just work through some points, his adjudication, his accommodation, and his alternative for today. His adjudication, his accommodation, and his alternative...let's look at his adjudication. This means to say his answer, or his judgment, verses 13 to 15.

Herod, according to verse 11, sends Jesus back to Pilate after abusing Jesus, mocking Jesus, treating Him with contempt. Sends Him back to Pilate like a joke. This man is supposedly a King, and a threat. When Pilate receives Him back, verse 13 says, "He summoned the chief priests and the rulers," and here for the first time it adds, "And the people." this is a dramatic change.

Remember now, they had a mock Jewish trial, the final phase at dawn which would be about 5 A.M. It happened very fast and then immediately they rushed Him to Pilate just after 5 A.M. Pilate's time with Jesus is very brief because there's no evidence, there are no witnesses and there's no proof. There's nothing to discuss. There's no prosecuting attorneys going through the evidence, there are no defending attorneys refuting it. No one speaks in behalf of Jesus and no one has any legitimate accusation against Him, it is all just an accusation without any evidence. It happens very fast before Pilate, he finds no guilt in the man, sends Him to Herod. Herod questions Him for a little while, thinks it's a joke, abuses Jesus, sends Him back. Now it's nearing 6 A.M. According to John 19:14...chapter 19 and verse 14...it says that when Pilate rendered his final verdict, it was 6 A.M. Because of Roman calculation because it's a Roman environment and uses Roman time, starts at midnight, it's 6 A.M.

Imagine, three separate trials...Pilate, Herod, Pilate...in less than one hour. What a massive abuse of any due process of law. No witnesses, no evidence, no proof, no discussion, and by now the Sanhedrin has been hovering around the entrance to the praetorium where Pilate sets up his judgment throne and they are being increased by the crowd now awake and up and the city teeming with masses of people because it's a Passover season. And they're collecting around the Sanhedrin. And so when Pilate comes out again, Jesus having been sent back, it's not just the chief priests and the rulers making up the Sanhedrin, it's the people.

Pilate knows He's innocent. Pilate knows all about Jesus. It was Thursday night, just a few hours before this, that the Jews showed up at the praetorium and asked Pilate for cohort of soldiers to go to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus led by Judas. So Pilate knows about Jesus. Oh he knows about Jesus because Pilate's place, the praetorium, is at the Fort Antonia and the Fort Antonia is adjacent to the temple and Jesus has been in the temple every day drawing massive crowds. Pilate knows about Jesus because on Monday when Jesus came into town, there was a crowd that could probably not be counted, teeming people surrounding Jesus, hailing Him as a King. Pilate knows about Jesus because the word all through the city of Jerusalem and they were privy to what was

going on in that city was that Jesus had raised a man from the dead and there were a lot of other miracles as well. And the reputation of Jesus was well established. After all, on Tuesday He had cleansed the temple which the Romans certainly would have known about and this was the second time He did that. He knows about Jesus. And he also knows that He doesn't have an army and He's not a threat to Rome. He knows that.
He knows that the leaders are jealous. That's how he views it. They do what they do out of sheer envy cause Jesus is good, kind, loving, popular, profound, powerful. He wants to do what's right, he has a sense of duty, but he's being pressured by the Jews to kill an innocent man. He knows it's wrong and he hates the Jews for doing this to him. And the last thing he wants to do is cave in to their intimidation because it's the thing about his own dignity. He attempts to stand on legal ground. He attempts to thwart their desire with justice. He knows Jesus is innocent and he knows they're jealous. He makes a stand on the ground of justice. After all, aren't they the supreme court of Israel? Aren't they men who have risen to this position because they have demonstrated their ability to do what is right?

But Pilate has a problem. The Jews have him between a rock and a hard place. This is the history you don't get in the New Testament, but I'm going to give it to you. In fact, it's in the white space between verse 13 and verse 14, you have to look very closely to find it. Okay? This is well established history.

Three famous incidents that happened prior to this that put Pilate on thin ice...very, very precarious ground. It was 26 A.D. and Pilate arrived in Jerusalem. He wanted to make a statement. He was maybe the sixth or seventh governor that had been assigned to this country by the Roman government, and he wanted to put on a display of his power. He wanted to establish his authority.

So, he came to Jerusalem. On his first visit to Jerusalem he came with a massive entourage of soldiers. And he wanted to let people know that he had the full power of Rome behind him. He really wanted to put on a display. So the soldiers are riding on horses and on those horses were poles and on those poles were banners...banners indicating the Roman Empire. On top of every banner was a golden eagle, and on top of the eagle was a bust of Caesar...the bust of Caesar on top of the eagle.

Caesar was a deity. The people in the Roman Empire were told to worship Caesar because he is god, or a god among many. They then saw these as idols and at least out of the Babylonian captivity, one good thing came...they forever abandoned idolatry. They despised anything that was an idol. All previous Roman governors had removed those. All previous Roman governors in Israel had avoided such offenses. Pilate was adamant. Pilate wouldn't remove them. Pilate held his ground. It became a battle of who is going to be in charge here and you're not and I am and I'll take them down only if I want to take them down and not because you want me to take them down. You have to establish here who is the power. So adamantly he paraded around Jerusalem displaying these idols.

He returned eventually to Caesarea where he lived, where the Roman base of operations was. And the people followed him. It's not a long trip, but they followed him all the way to the coast from Jerusalem to Caesarea. And they harassed him and harassed him around his place five days, demanding that he remove those idols.
Finally in frustration he sent word to them, "Meet me in the amphitheater." They thought we're going to get our audience, they went to the amphitheater. They gathered in the middle of the amphitheater. Pilate came. Sent his troops into the amphitheater, surrounded them and said they would all be slaughtered by th sword on the spot if they didn't stop the harassment and go back to Jerusalem. Historians tell us they pulled down their garments, bared their necks and said, "Cut off our heads."

Well, even Pilate couldn't massacre defenseless people on those terms without severe ramifications from the rest of the population and severe ramifications from Caesar for such a stupid thing that would foment such a response. He backed off and at that moment it was established who was in charge and it wasn't Pilate. And he hated them for that humiliation.

It was later that Pilate felt that the water supply in Jerusalem was inadequate. So he determined that he would begin a building project and bring a greater water supply to Jerusalem and that it would be paid for by money plundered out of the temple treasury, money that had been given to God. Well the people were so irate about this that they rioted and Pilate responded by sending his soldiers into the rioting mob and the soldiers clubbed and stabbed the Jewish people to death, ensuring their elevated animosity and hatred for him and his toward them. And Rome received reports on all this.

The third incident that put Pilate in this difficult position was that there was in the city of Jerusalem on the west side a palace. It was a palace that had been built by Herod. Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., built all over the place cities and palaces. And this particular palace was used by Herod Antipas when he came to stay in Jerusalem. It was also a place where Pilate stayed. And so Pilate because he stayed there thought he would decorate it a little bit in the Roman fashion and so he put shields up in this palace with the inscription of Tiberius Caesar on the shields.

Again, the Jews saw this as belonging to them, this palace, and this is a desecration by putting idols in this palace. They pleaded with Pilate to remove them and in another test of wills he said he would not remove them. And they sent a messenger all the way to Caesar. That's how long he kept them up, long enough for the messenger to get to Caesar and back. Caesar was furious, sent back a messenger who said to Pilate, "Remove them immediately. Take them to Caesarea and put them in a pagan temple." And the Jews had won again.
And that's why Pilate was on thin ice. If he did not do what the Jews wanted him to do now regarding Jesus, it was over. Three strikes already, how many do you get with Caesar?
By the way, he did another stupid thing. According to Luke 13 he sent soldiers into the temple while some Galilean Jews were worshiping God and sliced them up with swords. And their blood was spilt

on the altar. The Jews hated this man and he hated them for the intimidation. By the year 36, he was recalled, exiled to Gaul and killed himself.

So Pilate here is in a very difficult spot. Another Jewish report of a riot because he doesn't do what the people want him to do, another report of his ineptitude and he is done and it's about self-preservation. And he tries to do what is right at the beginning. He says to them in verse 14, and what I'm going to read you now is a very simple yet technical legal format. He acted like a judge according to protocol. "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion," that's the accusation part. "And behold, having examined Him before you," that's the examination part. "I have found no guilt in this man." That's the adjudication, that's the verdict. This is a legal trial. It has an accusation, an examination and an adjudication. He tries to stand on justice. And then he brings in Herod to weigh in on it in verse 15, "Nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him."

He's acting as a judge. He's doing what is right. But he knows that this effort at justice jeopardizes his position. No one is accusing Him of a capital crime but you and you have no evidence. And by the way, when you have Pilate and Herod agreeing, you have two witnesses and Deuteronomy 19 says, "Truth has to be confirmed by the mouth of two witnesses." Two witnesses...two judges...two unbiased judges had said no guilty, and Pilate said it three times, not guilty and he is an utterly impartial judge, so is Herod. In fact, Pilate doesn't care what happens to Jesus in and of itself, he has no interest in Him. Herod once wanted to kill Jesus. So these are not friends of Jesus rendering a bias verdict, these are the indifferent and the hostile rendering an accurate verdict.

The appeal to justice is useless, however. Pilate can sense it so he tries another tact. His adjudication and then turns to his accommodation, look at verse 16. "I will therefore punish Him and release Him."

Now wait a minute...wait a minute. Since He's not guilty you will therefore punish Him? What is that? What kind of justice is that? And by the way, the word "punish" here is not the word for scourge which he will have done to Jesus later, it's the word paideuo, and paid in English refers to a child from which we get the word pedagogy, the instruction of a child. A paidagogos would be an instructor of children.

So the idea of the word, "I will discipline Him. I will do something to Him that will be remedial, or instructive." And that opens a little window on what was going on here. Pilate was saying something that we know in Roman history the Romans did. In fact, they did punish people that came short of a crime as a way of warning them that if they continued on a path in that direction, this is what they would get. They actually punished people who had not been found guilty of a crime but might be going in the direction of criminal behavior as a way to tell them, "This is what you will get." So it was remedial. It was a kind of pedagogy. It was a way to give them some instruction.
So Pilate is sort of borrowing that modus operandi which the Romans did use, I will do something to punish Him, warn Him of what will happen to Him if He does lead an insurrection. But I don't really

think he cared to warn Jesus about that. I think he just looked for something he could use to appease and satisfy the Jews. Maybe, he thought, if Jesus was beaten, that might satisfy them.

Well, it did turn out later that he did more than just discipline Him in a warning way. He was scourged. And we'll look at that later in a horrific way, preparation to crucifixion that was. Luke doesn't tell us about that scourging, Matthew does, Mark does and John does in detail.

But before he does that, before he could move to that kind of remedial punishment, or whatever he had in mind, he has another idea, verse 17, his alternative, we'll call it. Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner. If you happen to have a New American Standard version of the Bible, you will notice that that's in brackets. You might even notice a little note in the margin that says it doesn't appear in the oldest manuscripts. This does not appear in the oldest Greek manuscripts of Luke, which means to us that it was probably added on later by a scribe who thought it should be included here. But it is in Mark 15:6 and in Matthew 27:15, in both of those gospels it does say that there was a release of a prisoner in the Passover season.

So it is true, it is historical and it is in Matthew and it is in Mark and was added later in to Luke. Some ancient historical sources tell us that this was part of the Roman strategy. They needed to do something to take the pressure off the people, something to show kindness to the people, so they had some principles of amnesty. And occasionally they would free a prisoner, giving amnesty to somebody, just to appease the people.

Not a bad idea. When the subjects requested somebody to be released because they thought that person was worthy of being released, the Romans would acquiesce to that and give a certain amount of amnesty. It helped sustain the Pax Romana, the Roman Peace, so that every nation that they had conquered and occupied wasn't fighting against them all the time. Pilate had to face a traditional release that he allowed each Passover. We don't know the origin of it, we don't know where it came from, but apparently each Passover they would release a prisoner. So this seemed to him, he was a very bright guy, this seemed to him a really good strategy, a hopeful alternative.

Now remember, on Monday he knew that the people had hailed Jesus as their King and that Jesus was massively popular and that He was good and did good everywhere He went. And they thought highly of Jesus, more highly than anybody he had ever known in the time that he had been ruler in that land. Jesus was by far the most popular person who had ever came along. And He drew these massive crowds who were in awe of Him. This is the right scenario, he thinks, "I'll give them the option of Jesus or somebody else." And by now the crowd has pressed around the Sanhedrin and Pilate is thinking, "I'll appeal to Jesus' popularity among the crowd and the crowd will want Jesus and they'll overpower their leaders." That's his strategy.

Now to see what happened, you have to go to Matthew 27. So turn there with me. Matthew 27 verse 15, Matthew looking at the same scene gives us these details. “At the feast, the governor was accustomed to release for the multitude any one prisoner whom they wanted.” This was the whole idea, you give them who they want. And that works to sustain a sense of mercy and peace in their relationships.

Verse 16, “They were holding at that time a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.” Pilate knew that because Pilate had probably been the judge in his case. He is not just any prisoner, he is a notorious, or a notable prisoner, not just average, well-known, serious criminal. John 18:40 says he is a robber, literally a plunderer, a bandit. Clearly from Luke verse 19 of that 23rd chapter, he was the leader of an insurrection against Rome in which he was found guilty of murder. This is a serious insurrectionist. This is a rebel trying to lead a revolution against Rome and in the process he is murdering Romans. This is a notable prisoner.

By the way, Pilate has thought this out very well. Here is a man who is doing what they are accusing Jesus of doing and Jesus is not doing. Jesus is no rebel. He is no insurrectionist. He is no revolutionary. He isn’t killing anybody. In fact, He has a reputation of raising people from the dead. And in the mind of Pilate, he’s thinking, “Surely when I give them the alternative, the people will want Jesus because they understand if we release Barabbas and he goes out and starts fomenting his revolution, then many Jews may die under Roman reprisals.”

Where was Barabbas headed? Crucifixion. Oh yeah. How do you know he’s going to be crucified? Because that was the punishment for murder and for any crime against Rome. He was headed for the cross. Maybe the two thieves on each side of Jesus were two henchmen of Barabbas who didn’t get released and Jesus then dies in the place of Barabbas in the execution of the leaders of the revolution, for Barabbas was a robber and those two were robbers as well.

So he’s got a great alternative. Surely the people would rather have Jesus than Barabbas. Oh another strange irony. Barabbas, don’t know anything about him, but he has an interesting name, Bar–son of, abba—father, that’s his name, son of the father. How interesting. You want this man, the human son of the father, or this man, the divine Son of the Father? You want the divine Son of the Father or the human son of the father?

Verse 16 introduces Barabbas, verse 17, Pilate asks that question, “When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said to them, ‘Whom do you want me to release for you, the son of the father, Barabbas, or the Son of the Father Jesus who is called the Christ, your Messiah?’”

What a choice, for he knew, verse 18, that they had delivered Jesus up to him because of envy. Wow, what a commentary. The pagan Pilate knows Jesus is innocent. He knows that it’s all about envy. So he asks the question, “Who do you want? Pick your son of the father.”

And then there's an interlude. He says that to the crowd. He would have been on a porch high above the street, they would have been gathered there, swelling with the populace. He's trying to appeal to the people who are surrounding the Sanhedrin. He knows what they want. He's appealing to the people on the popularity level of Jesus. But in the moment that he poses the question, there's an interruption. He asks the question, "Who do you want me to release?" And at that moment, verse 19, "While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him saying," this is in the moment of all moments in this man's life and somebody goes...Psst, got a message from your wife.
Are you kidding? This is a message you want to hear. Hear's the message. She says, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for lasts night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him."

This is a distraction and it takes him away. Did she know about Jesus? Oh yeah, he knew about Him, he knew well about Jesus. They had talked about Jesus because men talk to their wives about things that grip their hearts. She knew Jesus was good, righteous, not a criminal. And here's the third testimony, the third witness. Pilate says He's not guilty. Herod says He's not guilty. Pilate's wife says He's not guilty. She is so afraid of her husband punishing an innocent man, particularly this man, she fears the consequences of injustice, she fears the consequences of executing this man. And she's so afraid of it that her fears have entered her dreams. Your fears not only dominate your conscious thinking, they dominate your unconscious thinking when they escalate to this level. She has an exaggerated fear, it's now showing up in her dreams and dreams then become nightmares. You can't have anything to do with this man.

And while this is going on, he's listening to the message, mulling over the message, the leaders of Israel in the middle of this massive people use those moments to stir up the crowd. Verse 20, "The chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitude to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death." How fickle are these people? Wow. In a matter of minutes, the leaders of Israel with their authority and their clout and their passion, and their relentless desire to see Jesus executed pollute that entire crowd. Oh how much has changed since Monday. And they condemn themselves, with all the rest. Annas condemned himself, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate and Herod and the crowd. "Put Jesus to death," they said.

The governor answered and said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" They said, "Barabbas." "Pilate said to them, 'What do I do with Jesus who is called Christ?' They all said, 'Let Him be crucified.'" It was a very inauspicious moment, wasn't it, when Pilate's attention turned away from the message of his wife and gave time to the leaders to pollute that crowd that fast.

At that point, we go back to Luke 23 and we'll draw to a conclusion this morning's study. Luke picks up the story at exactly that point, verse 18. "They cried out all together, 'Pan plethe." Plethora meaning full, pan meaning all, everybody in agreement, no dissenting. They cried out all together saying, "Away with this man and release for us Barabbas." He was one who had been thrown into

prison for a certain insurrection made in the city and for murder. “Give us that revolutionary.” This is a bizarre kind of thing now. Pilate is in the situation that he never wanted to be in. He knew Jesus was not a revolutionary and he assumed the crowd would vote for Jesus. Now, not only does he have to kill an innocent man, which he didn’t want to do, a breach of justice, but he has to release a known revolutionary, a breach of duty. He’s trapped. He’s trapped.

In Acts 3:14 it says that Peter said to the people in Jerusalem, “You disowned the holy and righteous one and you asked for a murderer to be granted to you and put to death the Prince of Life.” They did. There’s no way around it, no way out. It’s the wish of the Jewish leaders and the Jewish people. They did it. Away with this man.

Can you hear the contempt in that? What ever happened to Hosanna, Son of David? What ever happened to that? Away with this man. Oh that is the language of absolute contempt for Jesus. Amazing how things changed. “And give us Barabbas. We reject the divine Son of the Father, we’ll take the human son of a father. We reject the holy Son of the Father, we’ll take the criminal son of the father. Kill the Prince of Life. Give us a murderer. Kill the most magnificent person who ever lived and give us a plundering terrorist. Take the miracle working gracious Redeemer out of our presence and give us a robber. Take the gracious Son of the Father out of our city, out of our nation, out of our lives and let loose the vicious son of the father among us. Let the guilty live and kill the innocent. Treat the guilty as innocent. Treat the innocent as guilty. We reject the best. We accept the worst.”

On that day they thought they were done with Jesus, but they weren’t because He’s not done with them. All judgment is committed unto Him, every sinner who rejects Him will stand before Him to be rejected by Him. They judged Him unworthy of their presence and He judges them unworthy of His presence forever.

Poor Pilate, how sad is he? How sad is he? The people were the real blasphemers, not Jesus. They were the criminals, not Jesus.

Ironically, they judged themselves and damned themselves as all do who reject Christ. For all who reject Christ, according to Hebrews 6:6, put him to open shame, crucifying afresh the Son of God. What about you, what do you do with Christ?

Let me close the book on Pilate...a suicide a few years after this. So despised in history that legends have grown up about him. They started to grow up in the early centuries of the church. They’re strange legends. It is said in those legends that after his suicide, his body was removed from Gaul and it was taken to Rome to the Tiber River and his body was thrown into the Tiber River and the minute it hit the water, the evil spirits began to disturb the water and created such turbulence that they went right back into the water and took the body out. And legends say they took the body to Vienna and threw it in the Rhone River and it had the same turbulent effect on the Rhone River. And if you

visit the Rhone River in Vienna today, you will even see a monument there called, “Pilate’s Tomb.”

However since the Rhone River couldn’t even tolerate the body of Pilate, it was removed and it was thrown into the lake at Lezon(?) Switzerland. That lake didn’t tolerate it either and it was removed from there and taken to a mountain near Lucerne, Switzerland and the legend continues to say that it was removed from that mountain and it was taken to a little lake in the Cybellini mountains in Italy and it was finally placed there. By the way, that little lake is called Lago Deplialato(???). And some say every Good Friday the body of Pilate reemerges from the waters of these lakes and washes its hands. Such is legend
In contrast, the Ethiopian orthodox group in the sixth century sainted Pilate as if his contribution to the death of Christ was a good thing. What’s the truth? The truth is far worse than legend, folks. The truth is eternal hell. He condemned himself as do all who reject Christ. More next time.

Father, again it’s just such compelling instruction that we draw from Your Word and so wonderfully and amazingly supported by history. This is the truth. This is the truth. Your Son, our Savior, the innocent Christ neither blasphemer nor revolutionary who is God as He claimed to be, whose Kingdom is not of this world as He said, was without guilt, executed...not by the will of Pilate, not by the will of Caiaphas, not by the will of Annas or Herod or the Sanhedrin, or even the will of the people, but by Your will...Your will. You’re the one who chose Him to be the Lamb, it pleased You to bruise Him. You were the one who placed Him there as a substitute for sinners. He died on that cross not in the place of Barabbas alone, but in the place of all who would ever put their faith in Him. He did die, humanly speaking, and earthly speaking, as a substitute for Barabbas but spiritually speaking He died as a substitute for all who believe in Him, took Your full wrath. It wasn’t the wrath of the Jews that He felt there, it wasn’t the Romans that He felt there, it was Your wrath. My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? And He was there in our place, the Son of the Father, for all of us sons and daughters and he gloriously went there.

As we think back over the text, Lord, that we just read, Jesus never speaks, never even speaks of Him, how He looked, how He stood. No comment on Him as He resolutely, majestically, silently took it all for us. But, Lord, may we learn the lessons of all lessons, and that is when you render a judgment on Jesus, it doesn’t effect Him, but it effects us, every person. O God, enable sinners to make the right commitment to confess Him as Lord and Savior, for this we pray for His glory. Amen.

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