The Final Verdict from the Fickle Judge, Part 2
Luke 23:13-25
42-282

Now open your Bible, if you will, to Luke chapter 23. We are coming now to the final message on the trials of our Lord. The passage immediately after this one moves us to the cross. But when we finish this morning with the final verdict rendered by Pilate and the Jewish people on Jesus, we're not going to pick up the story of the crucifixion until August. That is so important, it is so critical, we want our entire church family to be a part of that, so I'm going to be ministering in all kinds of places the next few weeks. I'll be here two weeks from today, miss next Sunday, be back the following Sunday, but we'll have a different subject all together. And then I'm going to be gone a number of weeks until about the middle of August through July and into the middle of August. And we're going to wait, the timing is really perfect for us so when we come back then, we'll pick up the account of our Lord's crucifixion, that's the way we'll begin our fall time together. In the meantime there'll be many wonderful services and wonderful preachers occupying this pulpit, while I occupy the time to preach in a few places. Throw in a high school camp there with our high school young people as well, and do some reading and recharging of my batteries for what the Lord has for us in the fall. So this will be our last look at the gospel of Luke for a while and we're at chapter 23 verses 13 to 25, the final phase of our Lord's trial.

For those of you who haven't been with us the last few weeks, we apologize. We have gone through this now for a number of weeks because there are six phases in the trial of Jesus. The first phase is before the Jewish leaders. The second phase, large phase, is before the Gentile leaders. And in each of those phases there are three components. And so there are actually six separate tribunals in which Jesus is accused and in which judgment is rendered on Him. We are at the final one which then leads to His crucifixion.

Let me read the text starting in verse 13. "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."

The first thing that strikes you when you read that passage is the silence of Jesus, and it is a kind of deafening silence. As before Pilate, Jesus says nothing. He almost seems incidental in this text. Pilate speaks of Him three times but each of those times refers to Him as “this man,” as if anonymous. The Jews refer to Him in verse 18 and they also refer to Him as “this man,” and contained in that phrase is not only anonymity, but disdain, contempt. Only Luke in writing the history identifies Him as Jesus in verse 20 and verse 25.

What is striking about this is that the one they refer to as “this man,” the one about whose life the conflict has been generated is in some ways almost incidental. The main character here is Pilate. Pilate cares nothing for Jesus. Pilate cares for himself, does not want to be put in the position he’s been put in again by the Jews. Pilate wants to save his own career, save his own reputation, save his own dignity, save his own self-respect, has little thought for Jesus. What is remarkable about that is, the One standing before him is God in human flesh. The One standing before him, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the Holy One, God’s own essence. He is the Prince of Life. He is the creator of all things, without Him was not anything made that was made. He is the God of glory, full of grace and truth. He is the true and eternal Son of God. How can He be almost incidental to Pilate? And yet He is and He appears anonymous to him.

The Apostle John wrote the truth about Him, to know Him is to know God. To hate Him is to hate God. To believe in Him is to believe in God. To see Him is to see God. To honor Him is to honor God. And Mark adds in Mark 9:37, “To receive Him is to receive God.” He is the creator of everything. He is the judge of everyone. He is the only Savior of sinners. He is the glorious Lord to whom eventually every knee will bow.

And yet, in this trial, at best, He appears anonymously. At worse, He appears like a pariah. He appears like a blight on the human race who deserves neither justice nor sympathy. It seems as if He doesn’t even deserve the recognition of being human. This in the face of a life of perfection, a ministry of miracles in which He banished disease from the land of Israel, in which He delivered people from their diseases, from demons, from death, from ignorance, in which He had offered people the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of salvation and eternal life by grace and with it the full forgiveness of sins. This man who is marked by gentleness and meekness and kindness, who has demonstrated the power that can only come from God, power over the physical world, power over the spiritual world, and power over the moral world. This one who is, in fact, God Himself is not just incidental, He’s not just anonymous, He is treated as if He is the scum of society.

The scene is stunning. The scene is shocking as corrupt men hold mock trials to condemn the Lord of life to death. It all comes from the Jewish leaders. They are behind it all. They have already determined the outcome, according to the Scriptures, the outcome must be execution and not just any execution, crucifixion, the most horrendous kind of death ever conceived. They want Him crucified. They need Pilate to do it. Crucifixion is a Roman form of execution and the Romans in conquering Israel have taken away their right to capital punishment and reserve it only for themselves. And so, if they want Jesus executed, then the Romans are the ones who legally must do it.

All these trials began about one A.M. on Friday. Everything about the Jewish part of the trial was illegal. It started with Jesus being arraigned before Annas who was the former high priest and the real power behind the temple enterprises. The second element of that Jewish trial was before Caiaphas, his son-in-law, who is the current high priest and the Sanhedrin, about 70 men who

constituted the Supreme Court of Israel. The third element of that first trial was in the morning, right after dawn, about five A.M., during the daylight where they reiterated the very things they decided in the middle of the night to give them the semblance or the appearance of legality for according to their law, all legitimate trials had to occur in the daylight.

So, the Jewish trial involved first before Annas. Jesus then brought before Caiaphas in the middle of the night from one to three. Then from three to five He is beaten and abused and spit on and mocked. Then when the sun comes up at five, they have a mock public trial. In all three they have rendered Him guilty of blasphemy for claiming to be the Messiah and the Son of God.

They then march Him bound over to Pilate and three sequential trials occur under Gentile authority. The first phase is Pilate. Pilate listens to their charge. They have concocted a charge on the way over that they think will interest Pilate since claiming to be God, the Messiah, the Son of God wouldn't be a criminal charge to the Romans. They come up with the idea indicated in verse 2 of chapter 23 that He is a revolutionary leading an insurrection, a growing insurrection among the populace against Rome. That He is telling people not to pay their taxes to Rome and that He has presented Himself as a king, a rival to Caesar, this they present to Pilate without evidence, without proof and without witnesses. And Pilate summarily rejects it and says Jesus is not guilty.

That's not good enough for them. They want Jesus dead. They let Pilate know that. They will not accept that verdict. Pilate realizes Herod is in the neighborhood for the Passover. He has jurisdiction in Galilee where Jesus came from, so he sends Jesus to Herod to let him adjudicate in Jesus' case and Herod finds nothing of guilt in Jesus, mocks Him, adds to the abuse, turns Him over to his soldiers to do the same to Jesus. And then they send Him back to Pilate and that's where we pick up the story in verse 13. This then is the sixth phase of the trial of Jesus, the third before Gentile rulers.

When this one is over, the verdict is passed in verse 24. Pilate pronounced sentence that their demands should be granted. What was their demand? Verse 21, "Crucify Him." It ends with a pronunciation by this Gentile governor of Israel that Jesus be crucified as the Jews desire. When he renders that verdict, according to John 19:14, it is six A.M....six A.M. The leaders of Israel have accomplished their goal between one and six. They want Jesus on the cross fast before there can be any repercussions with the crowd because of His popularity. What they don't know is God wants Him on the cross fast as well, for He must be crucified, die, be taken off the cross and buried before Friday is over. First of all, He must die at the time the Passover lambs are being slain between three and five. Then He must be taken to the grave and buried so that He will be in the ground a portion of three days that He might rise as the Scripture says after being dead three days.

They don't know it but the timetable they have desired is the very timetable God has determined. As we look at the text before us, Pilate is the main character, another of the tragic, tragic men that occupy the scenes around the end of the life of Christ. Judas, Annas, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, Herod, Pilate and even the people mentioned for the first time in verse 13, because it's now between five and six in the morning, Passover day. The city is bulging with pilgrims who have come for the Passover. They start accumulating in the streets. It doesn't take long for the word to spread of what's going on. Jerusalem isn't that large. The crowd surrounds the Sanhedrin that are standing at the entrance to Pilate's Praetorium. While Pilate has now come out on his balcony and is rendering judgment, the swelling crowd becomes a part of the cry for the death of Jesus.

Pilate certainly must have been a very gifted man. He would never have been appointed to this

responsible position by Caesar if he had not demonstrated his abilities. He had to be a military leader because he was in charge of the Roman army in Israel. He had to be an administrator because he was in charge of taxation of the people of Israel for the benefit of the Roman Empire and he had to administrate all that was involved in that. He had to be a man of very, very sound wisdom and judgment because as the governor, he was the judge who was the final appeal in all matters of law related to Rome. This is a formidable man, a soldier, an administrator, leader and a judge. Whatever might have been his career, and there are some interesting historical things about that that put him in the place to be assigned this position, his record must have been one of great note.

However, at the time he appears in the New Testament, all we see is his ineptness, his weakness, his cowardliness. He is frustrated. He is intimidated. He is self-protective and he appears as pathetic in all of his encounters with the Jews.

Now remember, when he first arrived in the year 26, he lasted till the year 36 A.D., but when he first arrived, he came into the city of Jerusalem with great, great pomp, surrounded by an entourage of soldiers who were carrying great posts with banners, announcing the arrival of Rome in all its splendor. He offended the Jewish people greatly because on tops of those banners there were images of Caesar who was believed to be a god. The Jews saw that as idols. The Jews said, “Remove that.” He refused to do it. It was the first test of wills with the Jewish leadership to see who was going to be in charge. He refused. Because he was in charge wouldn’t acquiesce to their desires. They followed him back to Caesarea for five days. They harassed him. They hounded him. Finally he said, “I’ll meet with you in the amphitheater in Caesarea down by the coast. And he said, “If you don’t stop this harassment, I’m going to chop your heads off.” and they turned their necks and said, “Chop away,” in effect. And he couldn’t do it...he knew he couldn’t do it and they had won. The first great encounter they defeated him and his greatest moment, the moment of his arrival when he wanted to establish his authority.

Later on he wanted to build an aqueduct to bring water to Jerusalem and he threatened to use money out of the temple treasury. That started another riot in which he had to kill some Jews with clubs and swords in order to stop the riot. These reports inevitably went back to Rome. On a third occasion he decided to put shields up in a temple in Jerusalem which had the name Tiberius Caesar on them. The Jewish people again saw this as idolatry. Another encounter occurred, another conflict of the wills. Pilate held his ground, wouldn’t give in this time. At least once he would be the victor. The word went from Herod himself to Caesar. Caesar sent a messenger back to reprimand Pilate, told him to remove all of the shields from Jerusalem and take them to a pagan temple in Caesarea. And Pilate was for the third time humiliated.

Each of those times it was a religious issue. These are idols in the first and third case. And in the middle case, you can’t take sacred money and build a Roman aqueduct. The conflict came over religion. Keep that in your mind.

As the Jewish leaders arrive at Pilate’s Praetorium on this occasion, the issue seems to be political. It seems to be political. They have accused Jesus of being an insurrectionist, a revolutionary who has been successful in mounting a force against Rome led by Him, a would-be king. In the first trial, Pilate finds Jesus not guilty. That doesn’t satisfy the people, he sends Him to Herod. Herod finds Him not guilty, sends Him back to Pilate. That’s where we pick it up in verse 13, the adjudication.

“Pilate summoned the chief priests, the rulers and the people, said to them, ‘You’ve brought this man

to me as one who incites the people to rebellion. 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.'" This is a just verdict. This is justice. This is justice.

He makes an attempt, does Pilate, to do what is right. Based upon the fact they're accusing Jesus of a crime against Rome and not a religious issue at this point, he perhaps thinks that he can hold his ground. And, after all, he's appealing to the Supreme Court of Israel, the Sanhedrin who are the men who uphold justice in Israel.

However, it doesn't take long for him to realize this is useless. And if you compare the accounts of Matthew, Mark and John, you realize that this didn't work. The people would not accept a no guilty verdict and they come after Pilate demanding that Jesus be crucified.

Pilate then moves from his effort at an adjudication that was just to what I would call an accommodation in verse 16. "I will therefore punish Him and release Him." What is this? Why would you punish a man you just declared not guilty? Well the Romans had some precedent for this. If there was someone on a path to insurrection, someone on a path that could end up in the future in rebellion, they might punish the person remedially to warn them against continuing down that path. So should Jesus think Himself to be a revolutionary, should Jesus think for a moment that because He was so popular and He had all of these people surrounding Him as He had all week in Jerusalem that maybe He ought to start a revolution, I will punish Him remedially and threaten Him and make it painful enough that He'll know that we wield a sword that can be deadly and maybe that will deter Him from that in the future. There was precedent for that, so he was doing something that the Romans had customarily done.

That didn't work either. The people would not be satisfied with some kind of slap on the wrist, as it were, to Jesus. They wanted Jesus dead. The leaders wanted Him dead. They wanted Him gone. They wanted Him dead, you remember, Pilate knew for jealousy, for envy. He had the people, He had the popularity, He had the affection and these leaders who cheated people out of their money, robbed them blind in the temple did not. Jesus, of course, also had assaulted and attacked their false religion just that week, cleansing the temple on Tuesday and indicting the whole religious leadership of Israel and warning the people to stay away from them 'cause they were sons of hell who produced more sons of hell. So Pilate thinks maybe I can accommodate them. This is a civil issue and that is not going to work.

He has another option, we'll call it the alternative. Verse 17, "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." We looked at that last week, I won't go over it again. Just an interesting note. Barabbas in the language, Bar Abbas means son of the father. So he offers to the people son of the father human for Son of the Father divine.

Now Pilate is pretty shrewd because he picks a prisoner who is already been through trial and been deemed guilty. You notice there, don't you, in verse 19, "He had been thrown into prison for a certain insurrection made in the city and for murder." He was a revolutionary. He was guilty and established guilty by the court of doing the very thing that the Jews accused Jesus of doing. Jesus was not guilty, he was guilty. Pilate is going to unmask their hypocrisy at this point. If they're really concerned about

an insurrection against Rome and we can show that this man is not doing it and this man is already proven guilty of it and is guilty of murdering some Romans, then they're going to want Barabbas, right? Very shrewd. He's guilty of insurrection and murder. He is a revolutionary.

By the way, in John 18:40 it says he was a thief. It may well be that the two thieves crucified on both sides of Jesus were his henchmen and that he was intended to be on the middle cross.

But here again, the Jews are forced to reveal their hypocrisy. They pretend to be concerned about Jesus because He's an insurrectionist, leading a rebellion against Rome. But He's not. But here is a man who is an insurrectionist who has led a rebellion against Rome and killed people in the process and robbed in order to make himself wealthy in order to fund his revolution. But they don't want Barabbas to die. They want Jesus to die. Give us the revolutionary, the guilty. Kill the innocent.

It's at this very moment, I told you last week, that Pilate's wife enters the scene, Matthew 27 says, and tells him not to have anything to do with this just man because she suffered many things in the night in a dream concerning Him. Their guilt over sentencing Jesus under the Jewish pressure is mounting because they know He is innocent. And their fear of Jesus and their fear of this unjust act, and their fear of another intimidating situation with the Jews has entered their dreams as fears often do...at least her's. And she is one more confirming witness to Jesus' innocence.

By the way, all the Jewish tribunals found Him guilty. All the Gentiles found Him innocent. All the Jews said He's guilty. All the Gentiles said He's innocent, Pilate, Herod, Pilate's wife. And so, we know where the motivation and the responsibility for this lies.

By now, the people who have gathered around the Sanhedrin have been convinced that Jesus needs to die. Whatever they were saying on Monday when they hailed Him as their possible Messiah, has passed away from their fickle, fleeting minds and they are now seeking His death. All the witnesses of Scripture lay the blame humanly on the leaders of Israel and the people they influenced. As we saw last week, I took you through the book of Acts and showed you that.

But Pilate is having a hard time coming to this, wanting to maintain some personal dignity, wanting to maintain some integrity as a judge, wanting to do something that is right, wanting to avoid another humiliation by the Jews whom he hates and who hate him, he decides to be firm. And that takes us to a fourth point, let's call it his assertion. He tries to assert himself, verse 20.

"And Pilate wanting to release Jesus..." Again the Scripture says he recognized His innocence. "Wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, but they kept on calling out, saying, 'Crucify, crucify Him.'" It is at this point that Pilate asks that famous question in Matthew 27:22, "What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Christ?" That comes between verses 20 and 21. Pilate wanting to release Jesus addressed them. What did he say? "What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Christ?" They kept on calling out saying, "Crucify, crucify Him." And it's the people now and the leaders.

According to Mark 15, at this moment Pilate cynically adds, "Shall I release the King of the Jews?" His cynicism is palpable...Is this your king? Wanting to rub salt in their wound as the beleaguered Jesus who has been up all night, spit on, pounded in the face, both by the Jews and the temple police and then by Herod's soldiers, looks little like a king and much more like an anonymous

nobody. Shall I release the king of the Jews? He mocks them. And they scream all the more, “Crucify Him, crucify Him.” They kept calling out epiphoneo, meaning in the Greek to shout in favor of or against someone. And their roar is, “Crucify, crucify, crucify.”

You know, it isn’t just that they want Jesus dead. They want Him tortured. It’s inescapable. They want Him dead but not until He has been tortured. They want Him to die in the most horrendous way ever known to man, openly, publicly, naked, disgraced, humiliated in the agony of crucifixion, being suspended on nails, hanging under the sky in the sun in the chill of night.

The word excruciating comes from crucifixion. This is the worst. The crowd is vicious. They want Jesus to feel the indescribable pain of prolonged agony for days. They want Him to hang naked in the open sky. They want Him to be scorned by the massive crowds of Jerusalem at Passover season.

It was earlier in the week that the leaders were afraid to arrest Jesus because they were afraid of the crowds at Passover. No need for that, this is a fickle crowd, easily swayed...easily swayed. We’re going to look more into crucifixion when we get to the crucifixion. It’s enough to say crucifixion was the worst imaginable, to be nailed to a cross with wounds that had no massive blood loss in the hands and the feet, so the victim lived for days, suspended on those wounds and able for a while on those wounds to push up and breathe. But eventually the muscles could no longer function, strength was gone and the person couldn’t push up, and so died of asphyxiation. The corpse would be left to hang there, to rot or be devoured by carrion birds. This is what they wanted for Jesus. This is what they wanted, the leaders and the crowd on behalf of the silent nation of Israel. This is Israel’s final apostasy. Clearly they are the blasphemers, not Christ.

Pilate tries to speak over the roaring. Verse 22, “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.’” He goes back to his original alternative. I will just punish Him to threaten Him not to lead a revolution. This is what I call his assertion. He tries to assert his authority. He tries to take a stand to act with resolve and determination, not to be humiliated again by the Jews, to give in to their relentless pressure as he had on other occasions. He will do the minimum remedial punishment of Jesus. That he could find within the tolerances of Roman law. But his proposal of that is useless. Verse 23 says they were insistent with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices began to prevail.

When it says they were insistent, he uses an interesting Greek verb, epileimai which is used of the rush of a storm. The crowd is roaring like a storm coming at Pilate. The crowd storms Pilate. The pressure is irresistible. He has to choose between his own career, his own future or Jesus...he can’t protect both. If the Jews get carried away again, it’s going to go back to Caesar and it will all be over for him. His career can’t take another disruption like this. The Romans want peace in their satellite nations. He has not been able to do that. One more and he is finished. He can’t protect himself and Jesus.

At this point I want you to look at Matthew 27:24. Matthew is telling us the story right at this same point. Verse 23, Pilate asks, as we saw in Luke, “What evil has He done? They kept shouting all the more saying, ‘Let Him be crucified.’ Verse 24, and when Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the multitudes saying, ‘I’m innocent of this man’s blood. See to that yourselves.’” A riot was starting, that

was the issue. Another riot, he can't stand another riot. He can't survive another riot.

How adamant are the people? Verse 25, "All the people answered and said, 'Let Hisblood be on us and on our children.'" Wow. Pilate tries to speak, it's useless. A riot is starting. And he does a strange act, perhaps. He takes a big basin, brings it out openly on his balcony where they can all see and he puts his hands in it and he washes. Where did he get this?

Well remember now, he had been ruler there for quite a few years. He knew some Jewish customs apparently because this was not a Roman custom, but it was a Jewish one. It comes from Deuteronomy 21, you can look at it some other time, Deuteronomy 21:1 to 9. And I've written a note of explanation in Deuteronomy 21. There you have leaders in Israel washing their hands openly to declare their innocence of the blood of someone. This had become a Jewish tradition, a way to demonstrate your innocence. So he used a symbol they would all understand to say, "This is not my verdict."

As I said, every Gentile who weighs in on this finds Jesus not guilty. And he says, "See to it yourselves. It's in your hands. And all the people said, "His blood be on us and on our children.'" Blood meaning His death, we'll take full responsibility for His death. What a chilling confession.

By the way, that's what mob hysteria does. Acts 5, Peter preaching in Jerusalem, verse 27, he is dragged in before the council, the same Sanhedrin, the same Sanhedrin screaming, "Crucify Him" before Pilate, here they are again. Peter is dragged in. The high priest questions Peter and the Apostles, and this is what he says, verse 28, Acts 5:28, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name...the name of Jesus...and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching...listen...and intend to bring this man's blood on us." Did they forget in a few days? They said His blood be on us and on our children. Then they tried to deny it.

Well, poor Pilate...you can go back to Luke 23. He can't find a way out. He tried adjudication, a just verdict. He tried accommodation, a minor punishment. He tried alternative, offering Barabbas. He tried asserting himself and his authority. All useless.

And that brings us to his last point, his acquiescence. What else can he do? He is so committed to his own self-preservation. Verse 24, "Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand should be granted." To prevent a riot that would cost him his career and again he is defeated by them. And by the way, you remember a few years after this he was removed from his rulership, exiled and killed himself. Sad man. But to protect himself, he sold his soul. He released the man, verse 25 says, they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, Scripture repeats that just so you understand the bizarre...bizarre irony of that. But he delivered Jesus to their will.

With his release of Barabbas and the record of that, it makes emphatic Israel's blatant rejection of Jesus Christ and their hypocrisy before Pilate, as if they really cared about a Jew leading an insurrection against Rome. They were happy to get an insurrectionist if they could kill Jesus.

He delivered Jesus to their will. Matthew says it this way, Matthew 27:26, "He released Barabbas for them. After having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified." Mark says, Mark 15:15, "Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them. After having Jesus scourged, handed Him over to be crucified." Luke doesn't record that He was scourged. Matthew says He was

scourged. Mark says He was scourged. Luke says twice Pilate said, “I will punish Him.” And he did, and it was the scourging.

But John...John gives us a full account of what’s missing in the others. Turn to John 19. John 19 verse 1, “Pilate therefore took Jesus and scourged Him.” The victim was stripped, stretched against a pillar often with arms stretched high above the head and tied so that there was no way to defend oneself and so that the back was stretched open. Then there was a wooden handled leather whip with many strands and in the ends of those strands were bits of iron and bone and relentless blows were given against the skin that ripped the flesh and ripped the muscle and even down to the internal organs. So devastating was this that many victims died before they ever got to the cross just from the scourging.

The Bible doesn’t say anything other than that He was scourged. Matthew says it, Mark says it, John says it, doesn’t describe it. But anybody at the time reading it would understand it, the worst, absolutely the worst, ripping His back raw with blow after blow after blow. After that the soldiers wove a crown of thorns, verse 2 says, put it on His head. He would have been blood spattered to the point of not being recognized because as the whips and generally there were two who did the whipping, they alternated blows because it was such hard work, the blood would have splattered all over Him from His own flesh. They then crushed the crown of thorns, long thorns, as long as three/four inches long into His head to cause blood to run down His face added to the blood splattered from the beating on His back and sides.

Then they put a purple robe on Him it says in verse 2. Why did they do this? In the city of Jerusalem is a fort called Fort Antonia. Fort Antonia was where the Roman army was billeted in the time of our Lord. I’ve been there on a number of occasions. There is down at the bottom, I don’t know if it’s accessible any more but I was able to go there a few times, a floor called the Pavement or the Gabbatha. And it was on that Pavement that prisoners were held and retained who were ready to be executed. Still there. In the floor, the great stones that make up that floor, there are grooves and in those grooves there are configurations that were identified with a game that the Roman soldiers played. They played the game with their prisoners. It was a game of mockery, it was a game of scorn, it was a game of derision. It had to do with treating these criminals as if they were royalty. They played “King for a day” kind of games.

Philo, the historian writes about this and he says that the Roman soldiers liked to do this, both with prisoners and with, he says, idiot boys found in the streets, turning them into mock kings, then treating them with abuse and cruelty.

So they did that to Jesus as if He were an idiot boy. And they began to come up to Him and say, “Hail, King of the Jews,” and gave Him blows in the face...more of the same that He received from Herod’s soldiers and from the temple police and the Sanhedrin. Mock salutes, and then they would smash Him in the face with their fists. Matthew adds, “They spit on Him and they hit Him in the head with sticks.”

In the middle of the game, Pilate interrupts them and he brings Jesus out. Verse 4, “Pilate came out again and said to them, ‘Behold, I am bringing Him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in Him.’” This is the fourth time he has said that. “I find no guilt in Him.” Add to that the testimony of Herod and it’s five. Add Pilate’s wife and it’s six. They just keep saying it again and again. “Jesus therefore came out...verse 5...wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.” This is pure scorn

from Pilate to the Jews. He hates them more in this moment then he's ever hated them and he's hated them a lot. They're doing it to him again and he wants to deride them. And so he parades Jesus once again. "Behold the man."

"When therefore the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, 'Crucify, crucify.' Pilate said to them, 'Take Him yourselves and crucify Him for I find no guilt in Him.'" That's five times he said it.

"The Jews answered, 'We have a law and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God.'" This is their final trump card. This is it. The game is over. Now it's a religious issue. Pilate tried to take a stand on justice as long as it was an issue with Rome. Now it's a religious issue. Now he's back to the same problems that he had before when he entered the city with idols, when he put the idols up in the temple, when he tried to take temple money to build an aqueduct. Now he has violated their religious sensibilities and now here it comes again, this is their final trump, it's over and he knows it. "You're violating us again in our religion. This is a blasphemer who claims to be the Son of God."

"When Pilate heard this statement, he was the more afraid." There's no where to turn. "He entered into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, 'Where are You from?' Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to Him, 'You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You and I have authority to crucify You?'" That's wishful thinking. He's just proven he couldn't do that.

"Jesus said this," and He finally speaks, "you would have no authority over Me unless it had been given you from above. For this reason, he who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin." Your sin is great but it's not the equal of the sin of Judas because Judas was with Me all those three years, his is a greater sin than yours. But you wouldn't have any authority over Me at all if it wasn't in the plan of God. Pilate's guilty of his own wretched wicked sinfulness. So is Judas. So is the Sanhedrin. So is Annas, Caiaphas, and Herod and all the people. They're all guilty. But God overrules the evil that men do, even though He is purer, too pure to behold iniquity. Does nothing but what is holy. He overrules men's evil to achieve His own purposes.

Verse 12, "As a result of this, Pilate made efforts to release Him." He's still trying. "But the Jews cried out," please notice this. "If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar. Everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar." You release that man and we're going to go directly to Caesar to tell him that you released a revolutionary who was a blasphemer of our religion and you're no friend of Caesar. That did it. "When he heard these words, brought Jesus out, sat Him down on the judgment seat at a place called the Pavement, and Hebrew Gabbatha." It was a day of preparation for the Passover. It was about the sixth hour, six A.M., they calculated from midnight, the Romans did. "He said to the Jews, 'Behold, your king.'" The final mockery, the final scorn.

"They therefore cried out, 'Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him.' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your king?'" This is unimaginable, the ultimate apostasy and hypocrisy of Israel. "The chief priest answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.'" How corrupt can they be? What liars. What hypocrites. They wanted Jesus dead so badly that they would feign allegiance to a false god.

Do you understand that their rejection of Jesus Christ was not nominal and marginal, it is profound,

far reaching rejection? We have no king but Caesar. The irony of that is it was true. They rejected their true king and Caesar will not get you to heaven.

Verse 16 then, John 19, “He delivered Him to them to be crucified.” And that’s what Luke 23:25 says, “He delivered Jesus to their will.”

You go through this and you don’t hear Jesus speak except one time. And though He is battered and bruised and bloody, He is beautiful in silence. He is magnificent in perfection when compared to Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod, though He has been slapped, pushed, spit on, crowned with thorns, beaten raw, beaten with sticks, He is majestic. And it pleased God to bruise Him for us.

Though accused of all these things repeatedly, He is silent and His silence is condemning. It is necessary that He die. He is, after all, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He said, “I must be betrayed, arrested and crucified and I will rise again.”

This is the final apostasy of the nation Israel. It is tragic beyond tragic. But I want you to understand the heart of God even toward them. So, for a moment, turn to Acts 3 and we’ll wrap up our thoughts. But this is very, very important.

Acts 3 verse 11, there has just been a man healed in the temple by Peter and John. All the people are full of amazement. Peter speaks in verse 12 after the miracle, “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Why do you gaze at us as if by our own power or piety we made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered up and disowned in the presence of Pilate when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer, Barabbas, to be granted to you but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. And it’s on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know. And the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.”

Now watch this, verse 17. “And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance just as your rulers did also.” Wow, how gracious is that? “But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled.” You acted in ignorance and God fulfilled prophecy. And this is wonderful, verse 19, “Repent therefore and return that your sins may be...what?...wiped away.” You mean God would forgive those who screamed for the torture of Jesus Christ? Yes...yes. There is no sin that He will not forgive when the sinner repents. In fact, when Peter preached that, there were already three thousand believers in the city of Jerusalem who had repented and been saved and forgiven and given eternal life in the city of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. And then there were thousands more, and thousands more, and thousands more in that city. That’s grace. And that’s the reason Jesus died, to provide the grace that can be offered to the one who is guilty of crucifying Christ.

Oh by the way, one other text. Hebrews 6...Hebrews 6, verse 4 talks about those who have been enlightened. In other words, you’ve understood the truth of Christ, you’ve tasted it, you’ve been partaker of the power of Christ, the Holy Spirit who did His work through Christ. You’ve tasted the good Word of God, the power of the age to come. In other words, you’ve been exposed to Christ and the gospel in all its richness and fullness. If you’ve had that full exposure and you have fallen away,

it’s impossible to renew them again to repentance.

If you reject with full understanding of the gospel of Christ, it’s impossible to be renewed to repentance because you crucify to yourself the Son of God and put Him to open shame. The bottom line, anybody any time in any age who rejects Jesus Christ is guilty of crucifying Him and putting Him to open shame. Your guilt is no less than those who screamed for His blood on that Friday in Jerusalem. All rejecters end up in the same hell whether they were there or whether they lived in another time in another place in human history. But for all, including those who screamed for His torture and for all today, there is forgiveness if you repent for rejecting Christ and come to Him as Lord and Savior, your sins will be wiped away and the glorious irony of that is, they are wiped away by the very death of Christ.

Our Father, we thank You for this story, this truth. We have only scratched the surface of all that could be said about these events, but how glorious are they indeed to us. How wondrous is it that You overrule the worst that men can do to produce the best that You can do and that is to save sinners who were guilty of rejecting Your Son. We all crucify Him afresh when we reject Him. We all put Him to open shame when we reject Him. We all treat Him with indifference and scorn when we reject Him. And all men are born as Christ rejecters. And so, we all who have been forgiven have been forgiven of the crime of rejecting Christ. But we know that forgiveness is available. The great sin, the damning sin is to reject Christ but that sin, the worst of all sins, can be...will be forgiven for the one who repents and puts his trust in Jesus Christ, confesses Him as Lord. May that miracle happen in hearts today, we pray for His glory. Amen.

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