

Luke 23:13-25***The Innocent Condemned, the Murderer Released***

13 Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people,

14 said to them, "You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him;

15 "no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him.

16 "I will therefore chastise Him and release Him"

17 (for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast).

18 And they all cried out at once, saying, "Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas" --

19 who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder.

20 Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them.

21 But they shouted, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!"

22 Then he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him and let Him go."

23 But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed.

24 So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested.

25 And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will.

We as a people are terribly concerned with justice, and rightly upset when it does not appear to have been done. For instance, those of you who listen as I do to talk radio cannot help but have been aware of the story of the judge in Vermont who sentenced a man who had committed terrible crimes against a child to 60 days in jail. "I don't believe in punishment anymore" was the Judge's rationale. The injustice of his sentence outraged the public, and eventually he was forced to increase the sentence to 3 to 10 years.

The judge may not have believed in punishment, but amongst the American people there is still a deep-seated belief that where there is guilt, where there is wrongdoing and offense, there must be a reckoning. There must be punishment and that punishment must be *proportional* to the crime committed. 60 days was an outrageously light sentence, it wasn't proportional it didn't fit the crime any more than administering the death sentence for parking offenses would. I think most people in the USA would affirm the idea, that the guilty must receive proportional punishment, and the innocent must be released.

That's one of the reasons why most people can still be offended at what happened to Jesus in the verses we just read, you read it and you realize it's not right, it's not just!

Jesus has been brought before Pilate for judgment, and Pilate declared him to be innocent in verse 4. The crowd however was not happy with that response, so Pilate tries to shift the responsibility to Herod. Herod too finds nothing worthy of condemnation in Jesus Christ, so he mocks Him and sends Him back to Pilate. Once again he is before Pilate, what will he do? Well in verses 13 and 14 he gives a more deliberate judgment. He says in essence, you brought this man to me accusing him of treason, saying he was stirring up a rebellion amongst the people. I have examined him and found him to be innocent of these charges. Herod found the same thing.

There is the verdict – **“innocent of all charges”**

Now its worth considering this - why did God in His Wisdom, if the condemnation of Jesus the Messiah was inevitable as the prophets had foretold and as Jesus himself had warned his disciples saying – *“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. "For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. "They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.”* Then why do we have to go through the process of having Jesus declared innocent by two separate Judges on multiple occasions? Isn't it just dragging out the inevitable and adding insult to injury?

Well here is the key to understanding why that had to happen. The lamb offered up for sacrifice had to be without blemish. As God had commanded regarding the Passover Lamb for instance: *Exodus 12:5 'Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year.* One of the duties of the priests in the temple, was to make sure that this was the case:

Lev. 22:20 'Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it shall not be acceptable on your behalf.

21 'And whoever offers a sacrifice of a peace offering to the LORD, to fulfill his vow, or a freewill offering from the cattle or the sheep, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it.

In other words, in order to be a suitable atonement offering for the sins of others, the sacrifice had to be perfect. It couldn't be blind, or broken, or maimed, or blemished in any way.

And in order to stand in the place of sinners, to be the sin-bearer wounded for our transgressions, Jesus the Lamb of God, has to be innocent of sin himself. And that is what has been authoritatively declared by those whose duty it was in a temporal sense, to judge such things.

Of course having said that Pilate is already beginning to cave in to injustice, the mob is beginning to get ugly and so Pilate figures well if I have this Jesus whom they hate so much scourged, that is whipped, then perhaps that will satisfy them. Now what is he saying? This man is innocent of all charges, *therefore I'll have him savagely whipped* so something worse won't have to happen. I'll do evil that good might come of it.

It reminds me of a time in Summer camp, when a kid who was slow was about to get beaten up by a group of older boys. One of the older boys who pitied him and had befriended him, sized up the situation and led them instead in putting him head first into a big stinky garbage can figuring that was better than a beating. *Now is that right?* Kids? No, he should have stuck to what was right, and defended him. But in the critical moment he wasn't ready to make that sacrifice.

It's like Reuben's decision in defending Joseph from his brothers, "*let's not kill him, let's just throw him in a pit*" and that decision ultimately led to his being sold into slavery in Egypt. God overruled that situation for Good as well, but that doesn't make Reuben's decision *right*. Remember this, you cannot do good by doing evil, and no one can *force* you to sin. You always have a choice, the sin or the negative consequences, saying "they'll kill me otherwise" doesn't justify helping evil men.

Well, that won't satisfy them either. So Pilate then puts before them a dilemma, he offers them a choice between a guilty criminal named Barabbas and Jesus. We learn that Barabbas, was a rebel, a bandit, and a murderer. Pilate clearly expected that they wouldn't choose Barabbas, not only was the man a dangerous criminal, he was a failed insurrectionist. The Jewish leaders claimed they wanted Jesus dead because he was a rebel. If they chose Barabbas who was a KNOWN REBEL, then it meant they didn't care if everyone clearly saw this was just a pathetic excuse. Surely they wouldn't be so cynical as to do that?

But they do. At that point it has just degenerated to boiling seething rage. We want JESUS dead! Away with this man, release to us Barabbas! That too is ironic. Here is the crowd that welcomed Jesus just a few days ago with "*Hosanna to the Son of David!*" and now they are shouting "Crucify Him!" What had they wanted? A political ruler, someone willing to take back the kingdom by force. And now they see him broken and beaten and unwilling to give them the rebellion they desperately wanted. So they count the Messiah as being less valuable than a man who did at least try to bring about the earthly kingdom they so desperately wanted. How often have people repeated that opting to choose the man who offers fleeting worldly riches, glory, and success and who consistently fails to deliver rather than the man who points to the lasting riches of the spiritual kingdom.

Not even the offer of Barabbas has worked, Pilate tries one last expedient and has Jesus whipped, but that isn't enough. The crowd wants him not merely beaten, but tortured to death. Because that in the end is what crucifixion is. Execution whether it be by sword or bullet, is relatively quick.

The Romans had adopted crucifixion as a punishment because it took days and was excruciating.

So Pilate, although we know he attempts to clear himself from the charge of wrongdoing by alleging that his hands are clean of this Christ's blood, by a symbolic washing, finally gives the Priests and the Jerusalem mob what they are howling for. He delivers Jesus up to be killed as they wished.

Just one application:

We've already asked why did God have Jesus declared conclusively innocent several times during his trial, but another question is why the whole Barabbas thing, why did Jesus have to go through the ignominy of being so rejected by His own people that they would chose the vilest murderer and thief over Him? Well because here we see the truth of what Christ was doing portrayed so beautifully. Why was Barabbas set free, because Christ has been chosen to die in his place.

I mean imagine it, here is Barabbas a guilty man, a murderer and a rebel chained to fellow prisoners, knowing that this very day because of the sins he has committed he will be handed a heavy cross marched to the top of Golgotha and nailed to it. Then he hears a commotion in the courtyard above his head. Then to his amazement, a guard comes opens the door unchains him leads him up the dungeon steps and out into the sunlight and then tells him, you are free to go. The innocent has been reckoned guilty in your place.

We feel the outrage of the situation, because we associate ourselves with Jesus, the innocent. But that's not me and you is it? Are you the spotless Lamb of God? No. No you and I, we are the rebels against the Good King, we are those who have done murder <here> and <here> or perhaps even <here.> And we too stood amongst the condemned, waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting for the moment when we would receive the just punishment for our crimes. When we would receive the wages of sin. We are all the Barabbases. What then do you need? You need the atonement that only a perfect sacrifice of infinite worth could provide. You need one who can take our iniquities upon his own shoulders and wash us by his blood.

You need Jesus, more than anything else in this world you need Him. I hope and pray you have realized that, whether it was many years ago, or just now at this very moment.

You need Him, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.

I hope you can say that, I hope you are not ashamed to confess it.