
He was Tried

Matthew 27:1-26

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There have been many, many famous trials down through history.

Nuernberg trials of the Nazi war criminals...

O.J Simpson murder trial...

Trials of police officers who have shot blacks...

How will we stand when falsely accused? When tried by the world systems? When betrayed by our religious leaders and peers? How will we carry and conduct ourselves?

By a Conspiracy (v.1–2)

27 When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. ² And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.

Their Planning against Jesus (v.1)

The religious leaders meet to discuss how to execute Jesus. They are not going to be permitted to do so themselves. So, they need a strategy that will persuade the Roman authorities to sentence Jesus to death *under Roman law*. They have tried Jesus under Jewish law, but that is not going to matter to the Romans.

Their Handing Jesus Over (v.2)

While we are not privy to the discussions, we do see the effect. The Jewish leadership binds Jesus and hands Him over to the local Roman governor, Pilate. Binding Him signified that in their opinion Jesus was dangerous. They are handing over a *political* criminal who should be handled by the governor because Jesus is considered to be a danger to Israel and more importantly, to Rome.

With a Suicide (v.3-10)

The Jewish leadership has reached the pinnacle of their betrayal of Jesus. They have conspired and now handed Jesus over to the hated Romans to execute Him. This is murder by government proxy. But Matthew now takes to another betrayer...

Its Vain Regret (v.3-4)

³ Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴ saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself."

It seems obvious that Judas did not believe that Jesus was going to be condemned to die. Judas has not believed Jesus' teaching. Whatever his motivations may have been, he knows that

the charges are false. He has betrayed an innocent man. Now he wants to change his mind and reverse the events he has set in motion.

He goes to the Sanhedrin, the chief priests and elders and recants. He admits his sin. He returns the thirty pieces of silver. He wants them to reverse what they have done. They reject him. They dismiss him. He has done his evil deed. It is no concern of theirs now. He has to deal with his issues himself.

What a calloused response. It shows again just the horrible state of Judaism. Here is what should appear to them to be a repentant man, a sorrowful man, and they dismiss him. They have used him for their own ends. They don't care.

Is this genuine repentance or vain regret? It is a difficult question considering only Matthew's account. He recognizes what he has done. He has sinned, he acknowledges. He has betrayed an innocent life. He returns what was taken in payment. It is startling. It is challenging. Is Matthew implying that Judas repented, at least of the betrayal? I think so. I do not think that this makes Judas a believer. All through the book of Matthew, Judas never calls Jesus Lord. That is how Matthew distinguishes between those who are true disciples and those who are not. Even an unbeliever like Judas can be repentant, just as a natural man, a sinner.

Matthew has also attested once again to the innocence of Jesus. Even His betrayer acknowledges that Jesus was innocent. Jesus is not just an innocent man nor innocent of particular charges. His is an innocent life, perfectly holy and righteous. Even Judas' change of mind focuses our attention on Jesus.

Its Despairing Execution (v.5)

⁵ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.

Judas is so distraught. They won't accept the money back so he throws into the Temple courtyard. He went out into the night. As Jesus is being handed over to Pilate, Judas goes to his death. He hangs himself.

Its Tainted Money (v.6-8)

But now the religious leaders have a problem. What are they going to do with the money?

⁶ But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." ⁷ So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. ⁸ Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

⁹ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰ and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

It is not lawful to return the money to the Temple funds. There is a surprise here, right? The religious leaders paid for Judas' betrayal *out of Temple funds*. So it is lawful to buy the betrayal but not lawful to accept a refund? The unbelievable hypocrisy of the religious leaders just gets better and better.

So they took the money bought a Potter's field and dedicated as a burial ground. A Potter's field would have been a plot of land, behind a pottery shop where the broken pieces and

shards of broken or incomplete pottery were thrown. It was a discard pile. Matthew implies that Judas was buried there. That field remained a known burial place right up until the day Matthew wrote his book.

This fulfilled an Old Testament Scripture in Zechariah 13:11. The betrayal and the repentance are both seen in that prophecy. Over and over again, Matthew has insisted that we see the life of Jesus as wrapped up in the Old Testament. While we are not under the Mosaic Law, the Old Testament is still Scripture and has benefit to us, particularly in a Christ-centered way.

So, why does Matthew attribute this to Jeremiah? Did Matthew make an attribution mistake? But note too that Jeremiah had also visited a potter and (separately) had bought a field, and it looks here as if Matthew has conflated quotations from both Zechariah and Jeremiah and attributed the result to Jeremiah. (See Green, p.288)

With a Question (v.11–14)

The scene shifts to where Jesus is brought before Pilate. Pilate is somewhat confused by Jesus. Notice when Jesus speaks and when He does not answer.

¹¹ Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You have said so.” ¹² But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. ¹³ Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” ¹⁴ But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

The Sovereignty of Jesus (v.11)

Is Jesus really a king? Is He the king of the Jews? Now you have to catch the irony and the trap of the question. Pilate well knows that the crafty old fox, Herod, is the current and reigning king over the Jews. He know Herod is a usurper and has been appointed by the Roman government. This is probably a swipe at Herod. But it is also, a trap for Jesus.

Jesus replied with the same enigmatic reply that He used with the High Priest. “You have said so.” That is what you say. Do you know what you say is true or not? Do you understand what you are saying? Do you have any clue that what you say is the truth but in cosmic ways?

The Silence of Jesus (v.12–14)

Why does he offer no defense before his accusers? Is what they say true because Jesus does not deny the charges? Pilate is amazed at the silence of Jesus. With all the patently false accusations snarling around, how does He stand there, calm, unassuming, silent?

The Proposed Compromise (v.15-23)

Pilate is concerned that he is being tricked into executing an innocent man. So, using a well-established tradition, he offers a compromise.

¹⁵ Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. ¹⁶ And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. ¹⁷ So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” ¹⁸ For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. ¹⁹ Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent

word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream." ²⁰ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. ²¹ The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." ²² Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" ²³ And he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

The Passover Tradition (v.15-18)

Each Passover feast Pilate released any one Jewish prisoner the crowd might desire. This had been done partly to release a popular person back to the people and to maintain some semblance of political favor.

This year there is a particularly notorious criminal in jail named Barabbas. Pilate must know that Jesus is a popular figure. So, he offers a choice that he thinks is really no choice at all. In accordance with the tradition, he offers them Barabbas or Jesus. He offers them a notorious criminal or a rabbi. Pilate thinks he has settled the issue. The people will want the mild, harmless rabbi. The Jewish leaders may be envious of Jesus' popularity, but that will certainly guarantee that the people will ask for Jesus.

The Wifely Concern (v.19)

At this moment Pilate's wife warns her husband concerning Jesus: "Leave that innocent man alone, because I had a terrible nightmare about him last night!" Pilate's wife sends this message during the proceedings. This was certainly serious and needed to be weighed. Pilate's wife has called Jesus "a righteous man." So, now, Jesus is once again declared to be innocent and righteous. ¹

The Fateful Demand (v.20-23)

Pilate did not understand the absolute hatred the Pharisees had for Jesus. He has humiliated them. He has exposed them. He has not been willing to bow to their legalism. So Jesus has earned their hatred. The chief priests and the elders are controlling the crowd. When offered a choice, the religious and the leaders demand:

The deliverance of Barabbas (v.20-22). They will take the criminal. Give them Barabbas. Pilate is shocked. So he repeats it.

They demand the death of Jesus (v.23). They want Jesus crucified. They are caught up in the mob. They are chanting it.

"Let [Jesus] blood be on our heads..." So true. They will bear their guilt. Peter, preaching on the day of Pentecost sad that they, "with wicked hands had crucified the Lord of glory." But it is not just the religious leaders, nor the rent-a-crowd, nor the Jews but it is all sinners.

The Attempted Distancing (v.24-26)

Pilate is a consummate politician.

²⁴ So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." ²⁵ And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" ²⁶ Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

A Ritual Washing (v.24-26)

The last thing Pilate wants is a riot. The Jews had been hard to control and had many violent uprisings against Roman rule. So, he does another traditional ritual. Pilate washes his hands to signify his innocence in Jesus' execution. He is not responsible for what he is going to do. He is handing over the justice to the Jewish people.

A Whipping (v.26)

He releases Barabbas from Roman jail and hands him over to the people. Pilate now orders Jesus to be flogged. Afterward, the Pilate hands him over to be executed. He will be executed by crucifixion.

Reflect and Respond

Here is a word for us, "Remorse is destructive, repentance is creative. So, Judas went to destruction and Peter became a new man whom Christ could use and rely on." (Green, p.287)

Jesus left us an example of grace, submission, wisdom and silence in the face of false accusations and persecution. He has first gone the way that He told His disciples would walk in chapter 10:17-18, "¹⁷ Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles."

Jesus was, in His words and deeds, a witness to the Gentiles in His redemptive suffering. So will we be if God so accounts for us. In our standing and suffering and sacrificing, we are the testimony of the greatness of our Savior and Sovereign.

Barabbas was traded for Jesus. Barabbas was set free because Jesus was handed over. It is a metaphor for us. Jesus went to the cross so sinning criminals, glory pilfering thieves like you and I may go free.

Praise God for the One who took our place. Praise God for the freedom he brings.

¹ I do not see the profit of trying to figure out who sent the dream. Did God or did Satan? Who would be trying to prevent the cross? The text does not tell us. Pilate's wife had a bit of a reputation as a seeress. The point here is not the "dream" but the declaration.