

Matthew 27:24-36

"Christ Crucified"

From cleansing, to cruelty, to contempt, culminating in the crucifixion of J.C. That's the journey today's text takes us on. We're brought (literally) to the hinge of human history. Where the sin dilemma will ultimately be resolved. **It's interesting that by the means of a tree (the tree of the knowledge of good & evil), sin & its subsequent curse was brought into the world. Even so, God ordained (from the foundation of the world, [Rev 13:8]) that by the means of another Tree (the cross of J.C.) the sin dilemma would be absolved...**

When we last left off Pilate had a predicament on his hands. He was standing before a crowd that was beginning to fall into a frenzy, a genuine lynch mob mentality. He *knew* that Jesus was innocent. Pilate may've been a lot of things, but "stupid" wasn't one of them. He knew that Jesus had been handed over to him because of *envy*. **There was nothing that Jesus had done maliciously, vindictively, politically, militarily, illegally against Rome or anyone else. He had examined Him publicly, privately & openly declared Him a "just Man". He had the witness of his conscience, his legal examination, his wife had even interrupted the trial to tell him to have no part in what was happening w/Jesus...**

But the religious leaders refused to let him off the hook. They had persuaded/polluted the crowd into a frenzy, it was a mob mentality & he had 1 of 2 choices. Either have a riot on his hands (having been charged by Caesar to keep the peace in Jerusalem) undoubtedly resulting in the death & bloodshed of many (& the end of his political career); or he could keep the proverbial peace w/the people through the death of the one (even though he knew that he knew, it was wrong).

He even tried to play the crowd by offering to release a prisoner of their choice. Barabbas (a known terrorist, thief & murderer). Or Jesus, One who helped & healed many. The choice seemed obvious. But he'd underestimated the power of persuasion that the religious leaders held over the people. He said, "Which of the 2 do u want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!" Then *Pilate uttered the question that all of humanity is forced to reckon *with* & be responsible *for*, "What then shall I do w/Jesus who is called Christ?" It's a question of such magnitude that all of eternity weighs in the balance of your response. **Every man, every woman must make a judgment concerning J.C. There's no escaping it... But your judgment doesn't affect Jesus or *His destiny* even in the slightest, what He is, He is... & what you or I choose to *believe* about that has no bearing on Him whatsoever.**

But it has a *radical* impact on *me*. What you believe will determine *your* destiny... So let's not blame God for our destiny. Because God has given to *each of us* the *capacity* of choice & we each must decide what we're going to do w/Jesus who is called Christ. The wise thing to do would be to humble yourself before Him, ask Him to cleanse you of your sin, to be the Lord of your life & teach you what it means to follow Him.

Pilate, was being persuaded by the crowd (be careful)... Never allow someone else to determine the decision you make regarding J.C. Examine the evidence for yourself, then make your decision. Pilate allowed other people to persuade him... The question is; what will *you* do?* They began to shout "Crucify, Crucify!" Pilate said, "Why!? What evil has He done?" But there was no rationalization, only determination. They cried out all the more, "Crucify, Crucify!"

Vs 24-25

Wow... Question; does saying "I'm innocent" make a man innocent? Not at all. There is one thing that you can never rid yourself of, & that's responsibility. **Neither Pilate nor anyone else for that matter can wash their hands of responsibility. The responsibility regarding what to do w/J.C. rested squarely upon him & simply washing his hands of the matter won't make that go away.**

The bible is clear, "**Therefore, to him who knows to do good** (the word "good" can be translated "right") **and does not do it,** (as long as he declares it's not his responsibility, or somehow washes his hands of the matter, he's justified [is that what it says?]) **to him it is sin.**"¹ People will do all kinds of things to try & absolve themselves of guilt. They might do a # of good deeds to make up for something. Maybe they'll go to confessional, perhaps they'll go to church for a whole month without missing one time or they'll begin a pattern of prayer to make up for it. Listen, it doesn't work... Outward rites (or rituals) will never cleanse an impure soul, or an unclean heart...

O Pilate was on the right track, he needed cleansing... But not the cleansing of that water. He needed the blood of the very One he was condemning to death. What can wash away my sin? *Nothing*, but the blood of Jesus.

But listen to me, you cannot wash your hands of J.C. You are either *for* Him, or you are *against* Him, but you can't be freed from your responsibility *toward* Him...

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Jas 4:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Pilate thinks he's out on this one... "Look, I'm out. This is on you." Do you realize that there are sins not only of *commission*, but also of *omission*? That's what James was talking about. It's not always about doing the wrong thing, sometimes the sin is in *not doing the right thing*. Pilate was trying to avoid doing the wrong thing. The problem was that he *wouldn't do the right thing...*

He allowed the fear of man to poison & persuade him. What does the bible say? "*The fear of man brings a snare,*"² Jesus said, "*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*"³ There is a proper fear of God & an improper fear of man. Both will influence our lives. One in a beneficial way, the other in a detrimental way. I love that Vs is Ps 19 that says, "*The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;*"⁴ The fear of God will lead you in the way you should go. It'll keep you out of trouble, from things that will pollute your heart/mind/soul... So we have a choice, we can please God... or we can please man but we can't do both. Pilate chose to please the people...

Notice that Pilate declared Jesus' innocence again when he referred to Him as a "just Person". God is making sure that we understand that Jesus is not going to the cross for any sin of His own. He's there on *your* behalf, & on mine.

The crowd was more than willing to receive the responsibility. "His blood be on us & on our children." Trust me when I tell you they had no idea what they were asking for... They could not comprehend the enormity of the crime in calling for the execution of the sinless Son of God. Of course some 40 yrs later Rome would sack Jerusalem, burn the Temple to the ground & throughout the siege campaign it's estimated that some 1.1 million Jews lost their lives & 10's of thousands more were enslaved. Ultimately the Jews were dispersed throughout the world & lost their homeland up until May 14th 1948.

However, God is not finished w/Israel. They are still His chosen people, the promise still applies, "I will bless those who bless you & curse those who curse you." (Gen 12:3) & The day is coming when they will look upon Him whom they have pierced & weep over His wounds & receive Him for who He is; the Christ, the Son of the Living God... But willing to receive responsibility, we read in Vs 26.

Vs 26

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 29:25). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 10:28-29). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ps 19:9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Allow me to share one last word about Barabbas. When we consider him, we should consider ourselves. Barabbas becomes a picture here of all of mankind (of you & me). We're the guilty ones, justly accused & sentenced to death w/no chance of appeal. He didn't deserve mercy, he didn't earn God's favor, but when the opportunity came he didn't *refuse it*. He didn't say, "No, I can't accept this." He was given the opportunity to be forgiven & he seized it. Someone he didn't even know, took his place. The innocent on behalf of the guilty. That's you & me, Jesus died so that we might live, so that we could be forgiven. Barabbas received it, so many refuse it... it's a mystery.

Matthew mentions here that Pilate had Jesus "scourged". The scourging was a customary prelude to crucifixion intended to elicit/extract the confession of crimes from the criminal. They would take the criminal, bend him at the waist & tie him to a post so that his back would be stretched tight. **Then they would take the flagellum (it was a whip w/a number of leather strands attached to it, each of them having little lead weights at the end of them w/shards of glass, or bone or metal woven into them) & begin lashing the criminal. The idea was that as the criminal confessed his crimes they would go easier & easier on him until he had meted out his sentence.** However, if he refused to confess they would thrash him harder & harder until they were flogging him full strength. Now... Jesus had nothing to confess... So they were thrashing Him w/all their might.

Actually, it wasn't uncommon at all for a criminal to *die* during the scourging. The Jews had a law that a person couldn't be flogged more than 40 times. **So they would typically whip them 39 times. However, the Romans had no such law so they probably just beat Jesus until they were tired of beating Him. Scourging would literally reduce a man's back to a bloody mass of muscle & bone.**

In 1986, a man by the name of Dr. William Edwards wrote an article in the Journal of the American Medical Association entitled, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ". He said, "As the Roman soldiers repeatedly struck the victim's back with full force, the iron balls would cause deep contusions, and the leather thongs and sheep bones would cut into the skin and subcutaneous tissues. Then, as the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh. Pain and blood loss generally set the stage for circulatory shock. The extent of blood loss may well have determined how long the victim would survive the cross."

We read in the book of Isaiah...

"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed."⁵

Dr. Edwards went on to say... "The severe scourging, with its intense pain and appreciable blood loss, most probably left Jesus in a pre-shock state. Moreover, hematidrosis (the blood He'd sweat in the garden earlier that night) had rendered his skin particularly tender. The physical and mental abuse meted out by the Jews and the Romans, as well as the lack of food, water, and sleep, also contributed to his generally weakened state. Therefore, even before the actual crucifixion, Jesus' physical condition was at least serious and possibly critical."

Vs 27-31

So after the scourging they took Jesus into the Praetorium. The Praetorium would've been the governor's quarters where Pilate stayed. It would've been the pre-existing palace there & they entered into the common hall. Now a garrison is 600 soldiers. It probably wasn't the entire garrison because Pilate more than likely didn't bring them all from Caesarea but it could've easily been 2-300 men or more. It doesn't take too much room to fit that many people in, there are more than 300 chairs in this sanctuary.

Now it only took 4 soldiers to carry out the execution, yet they gathered the entire garrison around Him. Listen, it wasn't to prevent His escape. It wasn't to prevent the crowd from rescuing Him, or to prevent His disciples from reaching Him... This was all intended to mock Him, to add to His humiliation. He said that He was the King of the Jews so they were there to pay homage!

When a prisoner was crucified, it was common that they would be nailed to the cross naked, simply to increase their humiliation. Jesus hasn't been crucified yet, but His humiliation has begun. They stripped Him, & since kings wore royal colors they draped a scarlet robe over Him (think of the cloak you see on Roman soldiers).

Kings wear crowns, so they twisted together a crown of thorns & smashed it down upon His head... It's interesting that thorns didn't exist in God's original creation. They resulted from the curse because of Adam's sin (Gen 3:18). It seems therefore tragically appropriate to find Jesus now, as He bears the sin of the world to be crowned w/the curse of the earth.

⁵ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Is 53:5]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Kings have scepters, so they placed a pathetic looking reed in His hand & forced Him to hold it. & Since kings are rendered honor they bowed the knee before Him, paying a mockery of homage *to* Him saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Of course these men will take a knee before Him again one day but the circumstances will be a little different ☺. (Phil 2:8-11)

Then they shift from mockery/cruelty to sheer contempt. They begin to spit on Him, they snatch the reed out of His hand & begin to beat Him over the head w/it (the verb "Struck" is in the imperfect tense meaning that they kept beating Him & beating Him). Just as Isaiah prophesied, *"I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting."*⁶

The radical thing is that He could've ended it all w/a word. The author of Hebrews says that Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame for the joy that was set before Him. Finishing His Father's will, sacrificing Himself for the sin of the world, providing you & me w/the unwarranted favor, the grace of God that makes for our salvation...

When they finished humiliating Him, making sport of Him, they put His own clothes back on Him & led Him away to be crucified.

That doesn't mean that He just walked outside the city gate. Rome took the opportunity to advertise what would happen to those who rebelled against them & would take a long route to the site of execution w/a centurion on horseback & a herald shouting out the crimes of the condemned. It was a way of warning would be criminals.

Now if you've seen a painting or a movie that depicted Jesus carrying the entire cross that isn't exactly accurate. An entire cross would weigh around 300 lbs. They would typically have their hands tied to the crossbeam (about 75-100 lbs) & be forced to carry that. The upright beam was typically fixed at the site of execution. It's more than likely that Jesus passed by the very upright that He Himself would hang on many times.

But this is the picture Jesus was painting when He said, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."*⁷ The cross wasn't about religious ceremonies, traditions or spiritual feelings. It wasn't a sanitized, sterilized or ritualized piece of jewelry. It was an unrelenting instrument of death of which there was no return ticket. You see someone carrying the cross they're on a 1 way trip.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Is 50:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 16:24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& They're definitely not about their own will, but they're carrying out the will of another.

Vs 32-34

The general consensus is that Jesus was too weak at this point to carry His own cross (the beatings, the lack of sleep, the scourging...) so they compelled a man by the name of Simon, of Cyrene (some 800 miles away) to carry it for Him.

No doubt he'd made the journey to celebrate Passover & now he's being made ceremonially unclean being forced to carry this Man's cross. But what he thought was a burden was the most blessed privilege of all. He came to Jerusalem to sacrifice his Passover lamb. Instead he bore the cross of the Lamb of God who was to be sacrificed for him! (Mark indicates that he himself was saved & his sons became well known in the early church.)

But this is the cost of our sin, this is what God thinks of our sin. It deserves to be beaten, mocked, scourged, spat upon, shamed & crucified.

Consider this as well. We serve a God who understands pain, who knows humiliation & shame. Every hurt that rends your heart, Christ knows it & has shared in it Himself. There may be others who won't understand, Jesus understands, you can turn to Him & find refuge in Him.

& When they'd come to Golgotha (Calvary) they gave Him sour wine mingled w/gall to drink, but when He had tasted it, He would not drink it. It seems it was customary to give those about to be crucified a sort of pain-numbing, mind numbing drink. But Jesus refused to drink of the numbing agents of this world. He chose rather to drink the full fury of the cup of the Father's wrath, down to the dregs.

How many times people are tempted to take the easy way out. To "numb themselves" to the pains of this world. Be it through perhaps a cigarette, maybe a few beers, perhaps through a gallon of ice cream... ☺ Coping mechanisms to deaden the pain a little bit. Jesus refused that kind of thing. He very soberly, intentionally offered up His life to satisfy the penalty of sin on our behalf.

Now I'm not talking about a morphine drip at the end stages of life. Nothing wrong w/that if hospice administers that. But Jesus wasn't a Man suffering on His deathbed, He was doing the work of atoning for the sin of the world. He would bear the weight of it entirely, completely w/no numbing of the pain.

Vs 35a

It's kind of interesting that that's all we get. "Then they crucified Him." We'll touch on it more next week, but they really didn't need a description of it because in Matt's day they were all well acquainted w/the terror of crucifixion.

It was developed by the Persians due to the fact that they had a "god" (Ormuzd) who considered the earth sacred so the criminal was lifted up from the earth so as not to defile it. But it was an incredibly brutal/torturous way to die, in fact it was illegal to crucify a Roman citizen. Our word "excruciating" comes from 2 Latin words meaning "out of the cross". But this is how heinous sin is in the sight of God, this is the type of sacrifice our sin requires.

Now, it's *terrible* to be forced to endure such a fate. But Jesus wasn't forced, He freely chose this out of love, what more could He have done to demonstrate His love for us. Write it down, look it up later, 1 Jn 3:1

Vs 35b-36

Jesus gave up everything (His life, His dignity, even down to His clothing), for us. Yet in it all, God was in control (that it might be fulfilled).

"Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there..." We'll pick it up here, next time.

Prayer Points:

Father we're blessed & blown away at how perfectly righteousness & peace have kissed in the work of the cross. Your righteousness satisfied, peace w/You supplied through the sacrifice of Your own Son. Jesus we thank You for Your great love for us, Your willingness to be made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in You. Teach us & strengthen us to honor You more, not to lead our lives in a way that make a mockery of You, but in genuine worship & obedience to You.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that if you would just believe upon Him, you will never perish but have everlasting life. God loves You. Jesus laid down His life *for* you. Now, like Barabbas you can accept it, or you can choose to remain bound in sin & reject it. It's up to you. I'd encourage you to turn from your sin, believe on the Lord J.C. & be saved today.