

The Messiah or the Murderer

Luke 23:13-19

June 1, 2025

Well, we want to ask that you would turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 23, Luke 23. We're looking at the judicial proceedings of Jesus as he stands, here in Luke 23, at the beginning, as he stands before secular authority; namely, the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. And the major theme of this section is, I'm sure you've picked it up: Jesus is innocent. He is innocent of all charges. All accusations do not land on him in any fitting, in any appropriate way. He's been slandered, maligned, accused. None of it is true.

We are in the section that begins in verse 13 this morning, but I'd like to start our reading back in Luke 23, verse 1, and then read the entire section through verse 25. So follow along as I read, starting in Luke 23 verse 1. "Then their whole assembly," that is, the Sanhedrin, "And the whole assembly rose up and brought him before Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, 'We found this man misleading our nation, and forbidding

to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.'

"So Pilate asked him, saying, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' And he answered him and said, 'You yourself say it.' And then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, 'I find no guilt in this man.' But they kept on insisting, saying, 'He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee, even as far as this place.' Now when Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself was also in Jerusalem in those days.

"Now when Herod saw Jesus, he rejoiced greatly; for he had wanted to see him for a long time, because he'd been hearing about him and was hoping to see some sign performed by him. And he questioned him at some length, but he answered him nothing. And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers, after treating him with contempt and mocking him, dressed him in a bright robe and sent him back to Pilate. Now Herod and Pilate

became friends with one another that very day, for before they had been enemies with each other.

"And Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people. And he 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 in this man no guilt of what you're accusing him. No, nor has Herod, for he sent him back to us. And behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him. Therefore I will 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'd been thrown into prison for an insurrection made in the city, and for murder.)

"But again, Pilate addressed them, wanting to release Jesus, but they kept on calling out, saying, 'Crucify, crucify him!' And he said to them a third time, 'Why? What evil has this man done? I've found in him no guilt worthy of death; therefore, I will punish him and release him.' But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that he be crucified. And their voices

were prevailing. And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand be granted. And he released the man they were asking for who'd been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will."

In our exposition of Luke's Gospel, we are in this twenty-third chapter, and we've already covered verses 1-12, as you know. So we are looking at verses 13-25, this latter section, and it really divides into three parts. There's the verdict of innocence, which Pilate gives in verses 13-16. There's the demand for death in verses 17-23, and then there's their decision to compromise in verses 24-25.

Three parts in this latter section, verses 13-25. We're gonna cover the whole thing in two Sundays, so I don't have three Sundays to do one per part. I don't have one Sunday to do all three in one. So we're gonna divide this awkwardly. You just bear with me, but we're gonna go 13, verses 13-19 today, and then 20-25 next week. And I hope it'll all make sense at the end of the day.

This, without parallel, is the greatest miscarriage of justice in human history. We all understand that. We see that clearly. This is a terrible injustice. We can't think of anything that parallels it. We can't think of anything that rises to the level of what's been done here. And it's a double injustice, as a point of fact, for we read in Proverbs 17:15, it says, "He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to Yahweh."

How have we come to the point in which the Jewish people and Paul describes the Jewish people this way in Romans 9:4-5, "To them belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the Temple service, and the promises; to whom are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who's over all, God blessed forever, Amen".

How is it that these people, who on Palm Sunday, not even a week earlier, who cheered the arrival of Jesus as "The King who comes in the name of the Lord," and now they call for the release of Barabbas, a convicted criminal and murderer? Now they

call for the crucifixion of Jesus, the only truly innocent man ever, and their true Messiah. How's this happening? How can we make sense of this?

By this double offense, justifying the wicked, condemning the righteous, we're watching what seems unthinkable to us, that the chosen people of God, under the influence of these wicked religious leaders, they managed to make themselves utterly abhorrent to God, a total abomination.

How has this happened, and how can we avoid the same grave errors and deadly sins? That's our aim today. And if you think, "Oh, I would never do this," think again. Apart from Christ, apart from the Spirit of God who regenerated you to new life, you would do the very same thing. In fact, that's kind of Luke's point in taking us through the Jewish religious trials and also the Roman secular trials, and showing that all history, all people, great and small, high and low, from kings down to peasants, everybody in between; everybody condemned Christ. And if you think you're an exception, that you as a sinner would be smarter than the rest, well then your blindness is apparent and

pride. How has this happened? How can we avoid the same kinds of errors and deadly sins that they committed? This is what we want to see today.

I'm just gonna give it two points today, starting with this first one. Number one: the effort to free the Messiah. The effort to free the Messiah. This is Pilate's effort. If you want to write, Pilate's effort to free the Messiah, you can put that. With growing regularity, in these hours that lead up to the Cross, we see the total inversion of everything that we may have rightly expected. We see the religious leaders, those who abhor Roman occupation, those who look with disdain at the jurisprudence of Roman occupiers, and yet now they're really concerned about the threats that Jesus poses to Caesar; that he, they're concerned that he may be a usurper to Caesar, and they want to collaborate and work with Rome to try to deal with this grave threat to the land. We did not expect that.

We see the, the pragmatic Pilate and the carnal Herod. Neither of these men are paragons of justice. Neither of them are men of mercy either, having qua, en, no, no qualms of

conscience about killing any innocent people. And yet we see Pilate in particular, he seems really eager to exonerate Jesus, to declare his innocence openly, publicly set him free. We didn't expect that either. Now we see the people in verse 13, the people whom Pilate now summons together with the chief priests and the rulers, these people who, who profess their love for Jesus; who, as Luke has recorded, they hung on every word that Jesus had spoken. They loved to watch Jesus work and interact in the Temple in Luke chapter 20, in particular, as he's besting all of their authorities; that he's their man, he's their guy. And now here they, too, turn on him. Didn't expect that either.

So, in declaring Jesus' innocence, and in trying to set him free, it's not just Pilate versus the Jewish leaders here. Now we see in this text, it's Pilate versus the people. This is certainly not what Pilate expected in summoning them in verse 13. That's not what he had in mind. We see Jesus in, starting in verse 13, Jesus returns from appearing before Herod's court, the Hasmonian palace where Herod Antipas stayed when he was in Jerusalem. Jesus returns from standing before Herod, and it says in verse 13, that "Pilate summoned the chief priests and the

rulers and the people, and he 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've found in this man no guilt of what you're accusing him. No, nor has Herod, for he sent him back to us. And behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him.'"

Now, what is Pilate doing here? What is his strategy? He's already tried and he's tried in vain to avoid sentencing Jesus to death. He's tried to avoid doing the Jewish leaders' bidding. We've seen this in previous weeks as he tried and we saw this over in John 18:31, he tried to get them to adjudicate their own case. He even promised to turn a blind eye if they kinda did some street justice, Temple justice. "Take him yourselves. Judge

him according to your law." Well, that didn't work. So, rather reluctantly, Pilate has had to examine Jesus for himself. And what he has found in questioning, he's found that Jesus is unlike any other revolutionary. This man is clearly innocent. He's no revolutionary. He's seen insurrectionists. He's seen the

kind of rabble and the people that stir up mobs. This is, this is not this man. This man's clearly innocent.

So after the examination, verse 4 of this chapter, Pilate comes outside the Praetorium. He stands on the pavement. He says to the chief priests and the multitudes, "I find no guilt in this man." Nothing. There's nothin' there. That doesn't work, though. The chief priests press their case further. They try to coerce Pilate. They paint Jesus as some kind of dangerous spreader of heresies, and a revolutionary. He's a rival king to Caesar. He leads the people astray, and he's a threat to your tax franchises. He has a very wide following in Galilee, throughout Judea, and he's come into the heart of the, the capital itself. He's in the capital city, into Jerusalem. And so Pilate, hearing that whole, Wait a minute, comes from Galilee, he seizes on another opportunity, as we've seen, to get himself out of this; to avoid condemning an innocent man. He sends Jesus to Herod, and though Herod confirmed his judgement, that plan didn't ultimately work either, because he's back. He just won't go away.

So he assembles the chief priests who play the part of the prosecutors here in the co-context. He speaks also to the rulers; that is, the elders and the scribes who make up the Sanhedrin. They're the members of the Sanhedrin. And he says to them, "I have found in this man no guilt of what you're accusing him." All your accusations, not one credible point of evidence here. Not one, no, "nor has Herod, for he sent him back to us." Again, what is Pilate doing here? Here's what he's doing. He's laying out the basis for the public exoneration and ultimate release of Jesus.

He's not Jewish, but he knows jurisprudence, and he's familiar enough, too, with the jurisprudence of the people that he rules, the Jews, particularly the place in their own Law code where Moses says this, in Deuteronomy 19:15, "On the evidence of two or three witnesses, a matter shall be confirmed." Pilate wants his verdict confirmed. He wants to make it a matter of public record aligned with the Jews' own Scriptures. So, in other words, you may not regard my judgement alone, you Jews, but I've got Herod on my side too. He is a ruler who knows your laws, who knows your customs. He's grown up with you, you've watched him. And Herod agrees with me. Our verdicts are

independent. They're mutually reinforcing. Your own Bible backs us up in this. And now he's seeking a third witness among them.

Pilate wasn't born yesterday. He, he's ruled Judea long enough to know that his case, though it's bomb-proof, it will not be enough to satisfy the leaders. He's anticipated that. So while Jesus was appearing before Herod, in that interval of time in verses 7-12, Pilate used that time to strategize. He used that time to think about and plan his next move, which is what we're seeing here. What's his strategy?

Here's the strategy. Appeal to the people. Go beyond the leaders and go down to the people. Involve the Jewish people. Again, we see that in verse 13, that "Pilate summoned the chief priests, the rulers, and the people." And notice what he says. "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people," you people who are standing before me, "incites the people to rebellion. Behold, having examined him before you, I've found in this man no guilt of what you're accusing him."

So he's speaking to the leaders, yes. But he's really goin' after the people. He is taking strategic aim in his words at the people here. He's calling them to testify. He's appealing to their conscience. He's seeking whether they are going to agree with how the chief priests and the rulers have portrayed them; that is, as a blind mob incited by this Jesus to rise up in rebellion and execute a coup d'etat in Jerusalem. Is that you, people?

So if, he's got two options here, right? They can either agree with the leaders, or disagree with the leaders. They can either agree with his judgement, or disagree with his judgement. Two, two ways to go. So if, on the one hand, the people agree with their leaders, well, then Pilate's problem is solved here. He's found the full political cover he's been looking for. He can decide in favor of the chief priests and the rulers against Jesus. He can deliver him over to death, because if the Jewish leadership and the Jewish people share the same view of Jesus; if they agree, problem solved. If he agrees with the leaders against the people, he's not gonna find himself out on a limb.

There is no problem anymore. But if, on the other hand and this is what Pilate expects, if the people dispute the case of the chief priests and the rulers; if the people, if the leaders continue to express this unpopular view, and the people actually agree with Pilate; they're in favor of Jesus and he elicits that from them, then we see Pilate very skillfully, very cleverly, by bypassing the leaders, by involving the people, he calls them to sound off. He calls them to speak against this injustice; to express their support for this Jesus, because he is, after all, the people's teacher.

What does he expect? As I said, he fully expects the people, Pilate fully expects the people to favor Jesus, support him, call for his release. They've been singing his praises for three years throughout the land in Galilee, in Judea, now here in Jerusalem, praising him as he's entered into Jerusalem. He thinks that these people, by voicing their favor of Jesus, their support for him, calling for his release, he's gone, they're gonna be able to accomplish what he cannot accomplish on his own: To influence the chief priests and the rulers to ultimately release Jesus.

Nevertheless, though, no matter how this pans out, Pilate knows he can escape the dilemma that he's found himself in. Either get the people to share the responsibility in killing Jesus, or put an end to this whole ugly business altogether. Either way, he avoids sole responsibility for making a very unpopular decision, one that could lead to an uprising and rioting in the streets, and put an end to his political career.

Now, there's one more problem to solve here. If the people throw in their support for Jesus, as Pilate suspects that they will; if the people part ways with their leaders, differ, disagree; well then, Pilate needs to solve one little problem. He needs to provide the leaders with a viable way out. He's got to help them save face. He's got to help protect their honor and their dignity so that their reversal doesn't come across to the people as weak, but rather virtuous. How's he gonna do that?

He's got a plan. We see this in verse 16, how skillfully Pilate creates a viable solution for compromise. His suggestion allows the chief priests and the rulers to backtrack their decision to have Jesus condemned and sentenced to death, while

still appearing to do something about this supposed Jesus problem. "Therefore," says Pilate, expecting the people to agree with his verdict, "Therefore, I will punish him and release him."

Now, if we translate that a little more literally, the punishing is joined to, comes immediately prior to the releasing. So it reads, "After punishing, I will release him." Some translations say, "I'll have him whipped," or "I'll have him flogged." That's the word. It's, but it's a word for punishment. But then, "Releasing him," the word that Pilate uses here, it is an important distinction. It's an important word. It tells us what Pilate has in mind, and in terms that the audience clearly would understand. If Pilate had said, "I'll have him flogged," and he used the word *phragelloo*, that is the scourging that's used to soften a victim for execution. It's administered just prior, immediately prior to crucifixion. It's the scourging, *phragelloo* is the scourging of, spoken of in Matthew 27:26, also Mark 15:15, as Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified. Starts with a, a withering down of the victim, flogging him mercilessly, and it's applied to Jesus, right before the cross.

That is not the word that's used here. The word used here is *paideuo*. *Paideuo*. It's also used in verse 22. And that word, the verb *paideuo*, is built from the word for Child. *Pais* or *paideon* has the sense of providing, like you would to a child, providing corrective discipline. We might call it a chastisement. So this is what Pilate's speaking of here in verses 16 and 22. It's a flogging, a whipping, but it's a flogging or whipping to give guidance, as to a child. Leon Morris says, "The suggestion that Jesus should be chastised before being released strikes us as curious. If he is innocent, he should have been released without further ado. But in Roman law, a light beating was sometimes given together with a magisterial warning, so that an accused might take greater care for the future." End Quote.

This is what Pilate's suggesting. This is what he's offering to do to Jesus just prior to releasing him, accompanying the release. He's, he's, he's, he's offering an appeasement to the Jewish leaders in conjunction with the custom of the Passover, which we'll get to in a moment, but to provide a prisoner release. So, whipping Jesus, though innocent, is

really to put the fear of Rome in him. It's to put him on notice, not to stir up these crowds in any messianic cause. It's to say, hey, listen, Jesus, I know you're innocent, but where there's smoke, there's fire, right? So let's just give you a little bit of whipping, a little bit of beating, just to kind-of put you on notice. Don't even think about it. But I'm ultimately gonna release you. That's what's goin' on here.

Some translations, you can see, have a verse 17. Maybe you have a verse 17 in your Bibles. It's in brackets in many Bibles, to suggest that that verse is not in the original, that it's not actually what Luke wrote originally in his first autograph. It was added later. In my Bible, the LSB translations, it's in brackets. And it's, the verse says, "Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner." Some other translations have verse 17, but they don't indicate to the reader that it's spurious and it's not original. Still others, like my Greek New Testament, omit the verse altogether, don't even put in the text. They only acknowledge the, the verse exists in the apparatus at the bottom of the page, kinda like a footnote. So verse 17, I'll just have you know, is not original.

It is understandable how it had got there, how it showed up in some later manuscripts of Luke's Gospel, because it's kind of an editor's note that would be written to the side. And sometimes a, an uncaredful copyist might take a editor's note and think it's actually supposed to be part of the text. So it ends up showing up in later manuscripts. But in all the early manuscripts it is not there. That's how we know it's not original. But this editor's note kind of explains the tradition that Luke passed over, doesn't explain, but he alludes to. When copying the text of Luke's Gospel, we can imagine a copyist or an editor adding a marginal note. He refers to the custom, and he knew about that custom because he looked at Matthew 27:15 and Mark 15:6, both of them very clear, referring to the custom.

Matthew 27:15 says, "Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the multitude any one prisoner whom they wanted." Mark 15:6 as well, "Now at the feast he used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested." John 18:39, Pilate says, "But you have a custom that I should release someone for you at Passover."

Now we see in our day, Hamas holding prisoners and not releasing them, but only releasing them on threat of force. What is going on here? Why would, why would Pilate release to the Jews anybody that they wanted? Well, when you are an occupying force in a country not your own, there's very few of you and there's very many of them. Anything that you can do to show a little bit of favor and extend an olive branch to the occupied people, it can really save a lot of bloodshed, your own blood in particular. So Pilate is willing to go along with this custom of the Jews. And why would it be a custom at Passover? Because God passed over the Israelites while they were in the land of Egypt. He spared them. He spared them though they, being guilty sinners, he spared those people. And so Pilate, having prisoners, even though they'd be guilty, wouldn't it be a nice gesture, Pilate, Roman governor here in our land, to honor one of our customs and release to us one of our people, of our choosing, every Passover.

So in conjunction with this custom of a prisoner release, which Pilate offers here as an alternative to crucifixion, he's giving the Jewish leaders a face-saving way out, here. Pilate offers to chastise Jesus with a flogging before releasing him

for the Passover. Politically, pragmatically, really is a brilliant solution on the part of Pilate. Satisfies all interests. Flogging Jesus makes the chief priests and the rulers appear strong, vigilant, good leaders, protecting the people from this miscreant. The release of Jesus makes them appear merciful too. Satisfies the people. Pilate threads the needle here. He escapes the horns of a dilemma, so he thinks. He lives to govern another day.

Now as we turn to a second point, we've all read ahead. We know how this goes. We know Pilate's expectation of how he thinks this is gonna go. It's not gonna be fulfilled. So number two, point number two: The effort to free the murderer. The effort to free the murderer. And if you want to put, the people's effort, it is their effort to free the murderer. Luke records what was for Pilate an utterly shocking and totally surprising turn of events. Verse 18, "But they all cried out together saying," Pilate, you're amazing. Yeah, set Jesus free. Thank you so much. No, that's not what they say. "Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas." Pilate did not expect this. He did not expect this at all. And, and he did not expect the ferocity and the unity of mind among the people that he sees

displayed here. The verb that portrays the outcry as *anakrazo*. Same word used to describe the loud yelling and tortured howling of the demon-possessed.

So rather, and, and, and, also, rather than crying out as kinda distinct individuals, one here, one there, voices shouting from different parts of the crowd, Luke uses a word translated, all together, in our text, to show that this large group is acting in complete agreement, with one voice unifying their thinking, speaking, moving as one. And when does this happen?

With any rabble, with any crowd, in any political event, whatever possessed them, it possessed them as a collective whole. There is a singular demonic mind here with a singular purpose, hauntingly crying out, yelling out, screaming out, howling with a one voice. So these people, notice right here, after Pilate gets done speaking, he's just summoned them, he's just gotten done speaking, they're already worked up into a frenzy, which is pretty curious, isn't it? Because it had to have happened before Pilate summoned them all to appear in verse 13.

So while Pilate is thinking, strategizing, planning in Jesus' absence, as he's appearing before Herod, you know what the chief priests and the rulers of the people are doing with the people? Whispering in their ear, coaching them. He realizes, right at this point, they are not here to listen to anything that he's suggesting. They're here to demand one thing and one thing only. One single course of action will satisfy them. "Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas."

Now Luke has, as he tends to do in our text, he's abbreviated the account. He's giving us a very accurate summary and moving this along to portray Jesus as innocent, which is very effective. He portrays Jesus as innocent in the face of a multitude of challenges and accusations; a unified front from leaders, to people, and everybody in between, who are sinning in accusing Jesus. It's very effective in doing that.

There's more to see as we look at other Gospels, compare Scripture with Scripture. Notice he says, Luke records in verse 19, that this Barabbas had been thrown, some of you can see that

this verse, verse 19 is in parentheses, so it's kind of a parenthetical comment by Luke, to kinda fill it in for you, he says, "(This Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection made in the city, and for murder)." So this guy's a convict. He's a known felon according to Matthew 27:16. Matthew calls it a "notorious prisoner." Notorious, oftentimes we think, notoriously bad. Some bad, notorious means like, notoriety." This is a guy who is known.

Lest we think Barabbas had been falsely charged by Rome, wrongly imprisoned, he's some kind of political prisoner but really innocent; John tells us straight out, John 18:40 "Barabbas is a robber." The word robber, *lestes*, a, a word that emphasizes the use of brutal violence to achieve one's goals. So if it's, if it's taking other people's stuff, we use the word, thief to refer to somebody who takes somebody else's stuff by stealth. But someone who takes somebody else's stuff using brute force, violence, fear, intimidation, that's a bandit, or a highwayman. It's an older word, but that's the word used here.

So if we're talking about insurrection, which is what this guy's guilty of, and murder, think terrorism in modern day language; think beheadings, think suicide vests, think the brutal treatment of the total innocent, that's what this guy Barabbas is. Find out more about this Barabbas in Matthew and Mark, we just look at one of those accounts, and you turn over and see it in your Bibles in Mark 15, if you'd like to go there, Mark 15.

And in Mark 15:7 we read this, that, "The man named Barabbas., and Barabbas, by the way, literally it's, bar, which means son, and Abba, which means what? Father. Son of the father is this man's name. Kind of ironic that he's being exchanged for yet another son of the father, right?. Mark 15:7 says, "This man, Barabbas, had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection." Other than the Gospel accounts, we don't have any further non-biblical source that gives any information about Barabbas or the insurrection that's referred to here, the murder he committed. But we know this is true, historical, because the Gospels record it.

But we understand this kind of thing was not uncommon in Roman-occupied Jerusalem. It's why Pilate had to be there on feast, at feast times. He knew that this kind of thing happens from time to time. It's not uncommon. We know that this kind of thing happens in our own day. As we look around the world, we see occupied cities, and we see insurrections, and we see people who don't want that occupying force there any longer, so they commit these violent acts, terrorist acts. Happens in our day too. Nothin' new under the sun.

So here in Jerusalem, this is a recent insurrection. Not, no other record of it, but it's just the latest. It's in a string of insurrections that have happened, that Roman governors and Roman soldiers have had to deal with in this very troubled place of Galilee and Judea. It's labeled, though, as notorious, as I said, by Matthew, because his attempted uprising was evidently very well known among the people. The violence was evidently extreme, horrifying, terrifying.

We continue reading in Mark's account. Mark 15:8 says, "The multitude went up and began asking Pilate to do as he'd been

accustomed to do for them. And Pilate answered them, saying, 'Do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews?'" Matthew respon, records Pilate's question a little differently. He says, "'Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas or Jesus, who's called the Christ?'" He puts both options before them, and it's clear once again, he's trying to make the choice really, really easy for them. It's like a no-brainer. Obviously not the violent criminal, people, come on. Not the convicted murderer, not the insurrectionist, the terrorist, the guy who cuts people's heads off.

Mark 15:10, He offered this no-brainer choice "because he was aware the chief priests had delivered him up because of envy. But the chief priests stirred up the multitude to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead." Well, Pilate has seriously underestimated the fickleness of the crowd, how easily they'll flip. He's underestimated the strength of the influence of these leaders, who had apparently been whispering in the ears of the people, coaching them, getting them ready. It's always happening, isn't it? Little conversations and whisperings in private, so they come with one accord to the public meeting and do something completely unexpected.

Pilate underestimated all of this. He did not see this coming and more profoundly, he had underestimated, and had no appreciation for, really, what is at the heart of all of this, which is the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Sin is a mysterious power. Hard to make sense of it. He sees here in these people, in their leaders, the rock-like hardness of an unregenerate heart. He sees the ease with which even regular people, I mean, these are people that take their kids to soccer practice, baseball practice, they love to do fantasy football or go shopping. They, these are regular people. He sees how easy it is, even for them, to be willing to torture, and persecute, and torment and finally execute the righteous. Stunning.

I mean, Pilate's seen a lot of stuff. He's seen a lot of injustices. He's seen a lot that, frankly, perplexes him and doesn't make sense. Crazy stuff you see on the battlefield, crazy stuff you see leading soldiers. But this? Regular folks, churchgoing folks, led by their religious leaders, holy men walkin' around in holy robes, doing holy things at a holy temple. This is stunning.

You see the terrible irony of all this, right, at the heart of it. In all this talk about dangerous insurrectionists, they want to set one of them free, and they want to condemn someone who is being falsely accused of being an insurrectionist, who clearly has nothing to do with insurrection. There's not an insurrectionist bone in his body. Why would there be? He is the king of the universe. He's got nothin' to fight for, nothin' to prove. He said, "If my Kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight." It's not of this world. You're sorely misjudged my Kingdom. "You think that I can't now call upon the Father and have him deploy twelve legions of angels," and just wipe everybody off the map? I got the nuclear option. I got tactical strikes. I can do anything.

Terrible irony here. The chief priests accused Jesus as dangerous criminal, an insurrectionist charges that Pilate has cleared four times in this account, verses 4, 14, 15 and 22. Cleared him. Pilate knew what a dangerous criminal looked like. He knew what an insurrectionist was. He'd, he'd met with them. He'd judged them. He'd recently arrested, tried, convicted Barabbas himself in a violent insurrection attempt and for

committing murder. He knew what he was looking at. Not only is this Jesus a far cry from Barabbas, Jesus is, oh so opposite. Totally innocent, utterly pure, dignified, royal, absolutely holy, perfectly righteous, and to a profound depth like Pilate had never seen before in his life. We're gonna see more of that next week as we look at, in the other accounts, and see another conversation that Pilate's had.

It's, it's hard for me to preach sermons where I don't get to hear from Jesus, but this is one of 'em. I had another one last week, two weeks in a row. Jesus being silent; it's startin' to make me itch. What about you? Look, when given the choice, which to Pilate's mind is no choice at all, it's an easy decision. Given the choice, though, the people do the unthinkable. It's just unthinkable. That's the mystery of sin. It leads us to do the unthinkable.

Have you ever committed a sin, and then very shortly after it, say, What was I thinking? Man, that was stupid! Man, I regret that. That's this. Peter summarizes this shocking decision. Luke writing again and recording it in Acts 3:13 and

following, the Jews, they “delivered up Jesus, and they denied him in the presence of Pilate when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One. You asked for a murderer to be granted to you.” How dare you? How could they want a murderer set free, a dealer in death in exchange for Jesus, the author of life?

Barabbas is the dangerous influence in Israel, not Jesus. He's the insurrectionist, not Jesus. So what is it that explains this blinding hatred, this vile hypocrisy, the moral insanity portrayed here? Even though we don't read about it in Luke's account, Luke does record Pilate's second suggestion of punishment, down in verse 22. And I know I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit, but we see in verse 22, Filate, Pilate's final effort to stir up public sympathy, or maybe even provoke them to a better course of action.

John tells us, starting in John 19 verse 1, that this attempt to punish him or chastise him, *paideuo*, this actually happened. It says in John 19:1, “Pilate then took Jesus and flogged him.” The word that John uses is *mastigoo*. It's a

virtual synonym of *paideuo* in verse 16. It's Hebrews 12:6 that brings them both together to talk about the chastening of the Lord to believers, because Hebrews 12:6 uses both those words in parallel with one another, showing them to be synonyms.

So John 19:1, "Pilate then took Jesus, flogged him, and when the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a purple robe on him. And they were coming to him saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews,' and they're giving him slaps in the face. Pilate came out again," out of the Praetorium, "and again said to them, 'Behold, I am bringing him out to you now, so that you may know that I find no fault in him.' And Jesus therefore came out." He parades them before them. He parades him before them, and he, he's wearing this crown of thorns and a purple robe. And Pilate said to them, "Behold the man."

There's another scourging to come, which we read about in Matthew 27:26 and Mark 15:15. It's the brutal torture I was telling you about earlier, *phragelloo*, preparation for the crucifixion. This is not that. That's not what's happening in

Luke 23 verses 16 and 22. It's not what's happening in John 19:1 and following. This is not that. This is akin to what Herod had done earlier, and what Caiaphas and the chief priest had done even before Herod. No doubt that's where Pilate got the bright idea. Make a mockery of him.

But again, why is Pilate doing that? What's he doing here? Because he still thinks the chief priests, the rulers, the people see Jesus as some kind of threat. He's taking them at their word, as if they think he may be the leader of some new faction and stir up some revolt against Rome, lead a bloody, violent uprising in the city. So Pilate reduces this Jesus to mockery, to disdain, to show how weak he is and show the Jews once again, look, Barabbas is the real threat. Not this guy, not this Jesus. Behold the man.

Seriously. You want a competent murderer, convicted felon released? This guy, he's done nothin'. He's passively sitting here, taking it. Let Jesus go for the Passover prisoner release. Let Barabbas be crucified as the violent insurrectionist and revolutionary that he actually is, and everybody knows him to

be. Once again, Pilate fails to persuade. They have absolutely no sympathy for the tortured, bloodied, humiliated Jesus. No sympathy, no softness of heart, no sense of feeling in these people.

Again, these are, these people could be your neighbors. They could be sittin' next to you in a pew. They've got no sense of feeling when they see Jesus tortured like this. Nothin'. This is the utter sinfulness of sin. This is where sin takes people. This is the moral insanity of sin. Couldn't be more graphically portrayed than in this horrifying scene of blatant and brutal injustice. So again, we gotta ask the question we posed at the beginning. How has this happened? We need to know so we can avoid the same errors; so we won't commit the same sins.

Let me give you three thoughts here, just as we kinda wrap up. First of all, consider as you examine the scene and what's happening to these people, first consider the power of disappointed expectations. Consider the power of disappointed expectations, of wrong expectations, false expectations, all the unbiblical notions so many people believe out there, and hold to

be true. Yeah, the people cheered Jesus when he entered Jerusalem the previous Sunday astride a colt of a donkey. They hailed him as king. But what were their expectations of this king in his reign? Again, we're back to making distinctions, defining terms.

There's a lot of people in our day, aren't there; I hear 'em all the time in the media, from political stages, sometimes sounding very bold, talkin' about Jesus, talkin' about Christianity. What Jesus are they talkin' about? What Christianity are they tryin' to portray? What do they really believe in? Are they our friends? Do we believe in the same Jesus? They may stand on the same aisle politically as we do, but many of these people are no believers in Jesus, not the Jesus of the Bible.

Their expectations of Jesus in his kingly reign wasn't this, certainly wasn't this. It wasn't about this Jesus letting himself be arrested and made an object of scorn before these jeering occupiers. The Messiah, he, he's supposed to come and crush these people. We want to see the YouTube video, Jesus

crushes Romans. Yeah, rather see him tatted up, drinkin' Scotch whiskey, smokin' cigars after the battle, big combat boots, stepping all over Romans. He's supposed to lead the Jews in the final uprising. Drive these Romans out of their land.

Evidently, very clearly, they were not listening to him as he taught them. They weren't listening to, "Blessed are the meek, blessed are the peacemakers." They were seeing signs, sure, but they were refusing to look any further. They were not seeing what the signs signified. They weren't seeing where the signs pointed, that they were validating the messenger, so that people would listen to the message that the issue is their sin and they need to repent, they need to forsake their sins and obey Jesus Christ. They were not listening to this. Listen, people, they react badly and sometimes violently when they think you stand for one thing, something they really do want, only to find out you don't share their point of view, and you won't take 'em where they want to go. They can get downright mean, sometimes hostile, at times deadly.

We watched our church swell right after COVID, and we opened and other churches closed, stayed closed. We watched people come in here thinking, right on, defying the government. I'm with you. And then they heard us not defying the government, but preaching the gospel, and they said, I don't like you. I'm goin' somewhere else. Not everybody that says the word Jesus, not everybody that claims to be a Christian is one. Okay, so that's the power of disappointed expectations.

Secondly, consider the power of misaligned loyalties. Misaligned loyalties. You could say, consider the power of following the wrong leadership, standing with the wrong people, the ungodly authority, even when these people's theology seems to check out, but they got bad character or they justified devious means to attain these vaunted virtuous ends.

Oh, they look so good, don't they? They sound so good. They attract quite a following. They got a lot of fans and followers on their social media platforms. Their theology seems to check out. Their goal seems so positive, so uplifting. Their smiles are broad, their words are pleasant, their handshakes are

firm. But Jesus said, don't look at any of that stuff. He asked, "A blind man cannot lead a blind man, can he? Will they not, both of them, fall into a pit?" He also warned, "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they're ravenous wolves." They will rip you to shreds.

Calls, Jesus calls for discernment, always to be thinking people; to compare Scripture with Scripture, and apply Scripture to what you see and let the Scripture, what it says, be the arbiter of truth and error; to let what you see in the Scripture interpret for you what you see out there. Examine these people's lives in the light of God's Word. Jesus says, "You will know them by their fruits." You say, that sounds pretty pharisaical, being fruit inspectors.

Umm, Jesus said that. Again, folks, just to remind you, it's the regular Jews, not, not the religious and political leaders only, who were hypocrites, greedy, filled with greed, covetousness. It was the people, the regular folks, hard working, good neighbors. They're at soccer practice, football practice. They're there with you at the PTA meetings and in the

schools and doing bake sales. They're the ones that Peter indicted in Acts 2:23, "You nailed Jesus to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death."

Again in Acts 3:14, "You disowned the Holy and Righteous One, asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of Life." These people are gonna show up again at the cross. They're gonna ridicule him, mock him. You're the Christ. You're the one that we were looking for? All right, hop down off that cross. We'll follow you. We'll march on Rome. We'll, we'll clear up this city, clean up the land, drive the Romans out and take over the earth. Hop down off the cross. We're your people.

Why did they do this? Why, in the face of all evidence to the contrary, why did they ask for Barabbas and hand Jesus over to the humiliating cruelty of crucifixion? Because driven by the power of disappointed, false expectations, they are subject, you can even say enslaved, to the power of false leaders, of bad influences, of bad theology, of error, of lies. They hold fast to those things, too. Misaligned loyalties. And all that is due to one more, I mean, there's a lot of things I could add, a lot

of things I could say, but let's just add just one more consideration.

Third, consider the power of fearing man and not fearing God. Loving the praise of man, caring nothing about the praise or the judgement of God. We could say, re, put this another way, refusing to see and abhor sin. Yes, the sin of other people, their own sin. Refusing to see and abhor the profound sinfulness of man. Esteeming man when they shouldn't be esteeming man. They should be esteeming God, longing for the purity of God, striving after the holiness of God, seeking to worship this true and living God in spirit and in truth. Wrap that all up in, they didn't fear God. There's no fear of God before their eyes. By fearing man and loving the praise of man, by ignoring the abhorrent sinfulness of man, in the final analysis, they chose death over life.

Every time we sin, folks, we choose death, not life. That's what's pictured here, graphically, vividly, dreadfully. It's pictured here in the cruel, bloody cross of Jesus Christ. The utter sinfulness of sin. God hung him there. He hung him there

in public, naked, humiliating his own son, for all to see just exactly what he thinks about our sin, so we'd know how profoundly our sins offend him, how justly our sins provoke his wrath, how fittingly all our sins call for his judgement. And thankfully, beloved, that's not the end of the story. We still have the rest of the chapter to go, and we're gonna see signs of salvation even in this dreadful chapter.

We got a full, final chapter in Luke's Gospel. Luke 24 demonstrates the triumph of the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. We hear Jesus interpret everything to us in his risen body. God did not allow the holy, righteous, innocent one to remain buried in the grave. That would be unjust. He didn't leave him there, didn't let his body rot or decay one bit. Instead, he raised him from the dead. He brought the resurrected Jesus to himself in his body, to reign and rule from on high forever and ever, and to intercede for every single believer.

Jesus does that now, from heaven at the father's right hand. One day he's gonna return for his people; to all who set their expectations according to God's perfect word; to all who

are loyal to God's perfect son, and having no other allegiance; to all who fear God and turn away from evil, who love God in obedient faith; who repent of sin, and mortify their sin, and pursue righteous living; who live to worship and praise and glorify God, and speak about him all the time. As to meant, "To as many as received Him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name; who were born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man; who were born of God."

Christ died, we know, 1 Peter 3:18, "Died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that he might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh but being alive in the Spirit." My friend, if you're here today and you are still in the flesh, following false expectations, aligned with stupid loyalty to people who are just as human as you are, and just as lost as you are, if you fear man and seek their approval and praise, but you don't fear God, you can be set free today. Put your faith in Jesus Christ. See his atoning work on the cross as sufficient to save even you, take your sins in his body on the cross; The just," him, "dying for you," the unjust, "that He

might bring you to God. That is what you so desperately need.
It's what so many of us have found. Bow with me in prayer.

Our Father, we give thanks to you in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, the just one, the innocent one, the righteous one; holy, perfect, undefiled, spotless, blameless before you. And yet you put our sins on him and punished him as if he were us. You gave him what he did not deserve, but you gave him what we deserved. And for all who put their faith in him, for all who profess him and confess him as Savior, and follow him obediently as Lord, you give us what we do not deserve, which is righteousness. You give us eternal life. You will raise us up one day in him, giving life to our mortal bodies, so that the mortal will be clothed by immortality, and so we can mock death. Oh, death, where is your sting?

Father, if there are any here who do not yet know you, I pray that you would, by the Holy Spirit, awaken their conscience now. Push them toward Christ. Let them see him for who he is; this glorious Savior, perfect in every way. Let them see this great injustice at the cross and realize this is what their sin



does. This is what their sin did, and his death on the cross is what their sins deserve. Help them to see him, trust him, and find eternal life by your grace, we pray. Amen.