

Matthew 27B

- The passion of Christ is one of the best known, most frequently retold stories of a man's death in the entire history of mankind
 - Certainly, Christians know about Jesus' death from the accounts in the Gospels, or from hearing it preached about in service
 - And probably most of the world has at least seen the movies or the paintings or heard the musical tributes
 - And certain moments in Jesus' passion story have even become part of our culture by giving birth to iconic phrases
 - Today you will still hear hear people saying "carry your cross" or "washing your hands" of a situation
 - Which is why I've said multiple times that this intense familiarity with the story of Jesus' death is a doubled-edged sword
 - On the one hand, it means we all have a reasonably good understanding of what happened to Jesus and why
 - But on the other hand, it also means that we're likely to pay less attention to the details of the story when we revisit it
 - And yet those details can make a big difference in our appreciation of the account
 - So as we continue forward in the story today, I remind you to reset your expectations and try to set aside what you know
 - Last week we left Jesus standing in the Antonian Fortress before Pilate as the religious leaders press for a guilty verdict
 - Though Matthew doesn't record it, at one point Pilate sends Jesus to Herod for a short time, but then Herod returns Jesus
 - After receiving Jesus back from Herod, Pilate is utterly perplexed with what to do with Jesus
 - Pilate knows Jesus is innocent, and in fact, on three separate occasions Pilate declares that he finds no guilt in Jesus
 - But at the same time, he's struck by the religious leaders' fierce determination to see Jesus put to death

- Mark tells us that Pilate had figured out the religious leaders were acting purely out of spite against Jesus
- So now he can't decide what is worse: convict an innocent man or release Jesus and risk a Jewish riot at Passover
- So Pilate lands upon a scheme to enlist the Jewish crowd to his advantage hoping they will give him cover to release Jesus without a riot

Matt. 27:15 Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the people any one prisoner whom they wanted.

Matt. 27:16 At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas.

Matt. 27:17 So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"

Matt. 27:18 For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over.

Matt. 27:19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him."

Matt. 27:20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death.

- As we read, a tradition had begun during the time of Roman control of Judea to release one Jewish prisoner to the crowds each Passover
 - This tradition is not mentioned in history outside the Gospel accounts but it's easy to understand how such a tradition might have started
 - Passover in Jerusalem was always a time of unrest and agitation for the Jews living under Roman occupation
 - And since the Romans valued peace and stability above virtually anything else, they looked for a way to please the crowds
 - So Rome happened upon the practice of releasing a Jewish prisoner to the crowds each Passover as a gesture of goodwill
 - Pilate hopes this tradition can be his "get out of jail free" card to bypass the pressure of the Jewish leaders while pleasing the crowds
 - So Pilate arranges to put Jesus and another prisoner before the crowd and allow them to decide who will be released
 - And to ensure Jesus will be the One selected for release, Pilate arranges for the alternate to be a notorious mercenary, Barabbas

- Pilate hopes he's made the crowd's choice easy and obvious, because by all accounts Barabbas was an unloved career criminal
 - Matthew says Barabbas was notorious, meaning everyone knew Barabbas was a troublemaker
 - And in John's Gospel we're told Barabbas was a robber, and in the book of Acts we're told he was also a murderer
 - And Luke tells us he was arrested this time for leading an insurrection against Roman authorities
 - So this guy is nothing but trouble, and Pilate assumes there's no way this crowd will want to release someone like Barabbas
- In contrast to Barabbas, Pilate expects the sight of Jesus will likely generate sympathy
 - By this point, Jesus has been roughed up pretty badly, and His face was bloody and bruised...He was pitiful
 - So surely the people would favor Jesus, especially in comparison to a rogue like Barabbas
- So in v.17 Pilate seats himself in the judgment seat on the steps of the Antonian Fortress and brings the two men out before the crowd
 - And Pilate puts the question to the crowd, who should he release?
 - At this point, there's a brief pause as the crowd contemplates its choice
 - Meanwhile, the religious leaders are getting nervous that the crowd might fall for Pilate's plan and release Jesus
- But before the crowd can answer, Pilate is interrupted by an urgent note sent from his wife at home, so Pilate suspends the proceedings and excuses himself
 - Back in the fortress, Pilates reads that his wife has had a dream the night before and in her dream she says she suffered greatly because of Jesus
 - We don't know what she meant exactly, but her dream was disturbing enough that she feels the need to report it
 - Likely Pilate told her about Jesus being arrested the night before when he dispatched the cohort with Judas

- In any case, based on the dream she tells her husband now to have nothing to do with this righteous man
 - Again, we don't know what she was expecting Pilate to do, since he couldn't exactly ignore Jesus under the circumstances
 - But perhaps she's warning him not to condemn Jesus
 - Still, like most husbands, Pilate stupidly ignores his wife's counsel
- Now the question we do need to answer is why did the Lord give Pilate's wife this dream...what was the Lord trying to accomplish through it?
 - Obviously, the Lord didn't expect it to result in Pilate releasing Jesus, since we know the plan is for Jesus to go to the cross
 - So why give Pilate's wife this dream at all? We have two reasons, one from Church tradition and one in this passage of Scripture
- First, church tradition going back to the first century maintains that this woman's name was Claudia
 - And the tradition says Claudia, unlike her husband, came to faith in Jesus based on her dream and the testimony of the disciples
 - We can't know if this is true, though it could be true
 - And if so, then it gives us a clear reason for the Lord to appear to Claudia in this way
 - The Lord was working in her heart to prepare her to believe as a testimony to the Church thereafter
 - As wife of the governor, she would have been in a position to hear the details of Christ's testimony before Pilate
 - She would have heard the reports of His missing body and His disciples' claims of resurrection
 - And later as an unlikely convert, she would have possessed a powerful witness in her circles of influence
 - Imagine this woman's testimony..."my husband condemned our Lord to death"
 - So this moment shows the extent to which the Lord is willing to move in the life of a person to bring them the truth according to His will

- That's what Paul was talking about when he told us to pray for the salvation of all men and women

[1Tim. 2:1](#) First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,

[1Tim. 2:2](#) for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.

[1Tim. 2:3](#) This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,

[1Tim. 2:4](#) who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

- Paul says that the Lord wants us to pray for the salvation of all men and women
- And taken in its context, Paul defines "all men" in v.2 as "kings and all who are in authority"
- Paul was saying he didn't want us to overlook the possibility that God can bring saving faith even to those who seem outside His reach
 - While the rich and powerful don't come to faith very often, since God chooses the weak things to shame the strong
 - Nevertheless, some will come to faith according to God's will, and we should pray for them as much as we pray for the poor
 - And Paul adds that by praying for those in authority to come to faith, we may arrive at a more tranquil and quiet life for ourselves
- So Claudia receives this dream from God to set herself on a path to saving faith, according to tradition
 - She responded to her dream by trying to stop her husband, but God's purpose in the dream was to prepare her heart for faith
 - And in that way, the Lord provided protection and support to the early believers through her influence on her husband
 - Just as the Lord placed Joseph and Daniel in positions of authority to guard Israel's future, she guarded the early church
- And that leads us to the second reason for the Lord to give her a dream, and it's a particularly ironic twist that shows the sovereignty of God
 - While Pilate is dealing with the messenger with the note arriving from his wife, he must leave the proceedings with Jesus

- And during that brief delay, the religious leaders see their opportunity to influence the outcome of Pilate's scheme
- They realize that Pilate is preparing to present both Jesus and Barabbas to the crowd and they don't want Jesus released
- So during the delay created by Pilate's wife, in v.20 we see the Pharisees moving through the crowd influencing everyone against Jesus
 - Perhaps they threatened the crowd in some way if they didn't demand Jesus' death or perhaps they promised bribes
 - But one way or another, they convince the crowd to call for Jesus' death and Barabbas' release
- This is so ironic because they wouldn't have had this opportunity except because Claudia delayed the proceedings with her note to Pilate
 - In a sense she was trying to save Jesus and her husband, and in the end her note became part of the conspiracy to convict Jesus
 - And therefore, God gave her the dream so she would interrupt the proceedings so that the leaders could influence the crowd
- It's an amazing display of how God sovereignly ensures everything works together according to His sovereign purpose
 - And it's perhaps the most important thing you should remember from today and most days
 - God is in control...but not just in the ultimate sense that He determines how everything turns out in the end
 - But also in the sense of every little details on the path to the end
 - Because you cannot determine the end unless you also control the means to that end
 - God controls every single detail of life, and everything that happens whether good or bad (from our perspective) is according to His will

Is. 45:6 That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun

That there is no one besides Me.

I am the LORD, and there is no other,

Is. 45:7 The One forming light and creating darkness,

Causing well-being and creating calamity;

I am the LORD who does all these.

- We can see this truth at work in this simple moment where a wife gets a dream and reacts in a certain way
- And that small moment simultaneously makes possible a woman believing in Jesus and her husband killing Jesus
- Remember this next time you face troubling circumstances and remind yourself that God brought this for a reason to work good in some way
 - The good may be hard to see in the midst of the pain, just as I'm sure Claudia was upset at Pilate when she learned his decision
 - But give God time to work and to reveal His purpose, and trust Him in the meantime and know He is in control
 - Not just of how your story ends...but of every step along the way
- So Pilate returns from dealing with his wife's interruption, sits down again in the judgment seat, and commences with his plan to give the crowd a choice

[Matt. 27:21](#) But the governor said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas."

[Matt. 27:22](#) Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Crucify Him!"

[Matt. 27:23](#) And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!"

[Matt. 27:24](#) When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves."

[Matt. 27:25](#) And all the people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!"

- Now Pilate's shrewd plan to release Jesus has turned into a strategic blunder and plays right into the hands of the Jewish leaders
 - In v.21 when Pilate puts the question to the crowd again (Who do I release?), this time the religious leaders and the crowd are ready
 - They've been primed with the answer, so in unison they all call out: Barabbas!

- Pilate is astonished...he can hardly believe it...so he asks again, what evil has Jesus done to deserve such a painful death?
 - Of course, the crowd does not have an answer to that question, they only know what they are supposed to say: Crucify Him!
 - Matthew records Pilate asking the crowd just this one time, but altogether in the Gospels Pilate asks the crowd three times
 - Each time Pilate tries to lead the crowd into choosing to release Jesus, and each time they repeat they want Jesus to be crucified
- In fact, at one point Pilate goes so far as to take Jesus away and have him scourged in the hope of increasing sympathy for Jesus
 - Next week we will cover the effect of Roman scourging (parental warning) but for now you need only know it was devastating
 - And yet when Jesus is brought back before the crowd, there was still no sympathy for Him despite his miserable appearance
- Altogether the Gospels record Pilate trying to release Jesus five separate times, and each time the crowd grows more vociferous in their demands
 - Until finally Pilate realizes he is in danger of starting the very riot he was trying to avoid, and at that point he knows he's beaten
 - So from the judgment seat he pronounces Jesus will die despite being innocent
- So Pilate will put Jesus to death while Barabbas will be released, and in that moment, the Lord's sovereignty was on display once more
 - On one side of Pilate stood Yeshua (Jesus) the Son of God the Father
 - Jesus was the righteous one, the Son of the Living God
 - And the Bible tells us Jesus is the First Born among many brethren, meaning He brings forth a family born again by faith
 - And then on Pilate's other side stood Barabbas, a criminal
 - Barabbas was not the man's actual name, because Barabbas is a Greek transliteration of a Hebrew title
 - The term "bar Abbas" in Hebrew means "son of Abbas" and Abbas is the Aramaic word for father, so he was called "son of the father"

- And an early church father, Origen, records that this man's given name was Yeshua, which was a very common Jewish name in that day
- So that means that on that day, on either side of Pilate stood two men both called Yeshua son of the father
- God prepared that moment such that Jesus and Barabbas would serve as federal representatives of their respective spiritual families
 - Barabbas was the son of his father, the devil, and as such he was the perfect representation of Satan's nature
 - The Bible calls Satan a liar, a thief, a murderer, and a usurper of thrones
 - And we've already heard that Barabbas was a liar, thief, murderer and a usurper of Roman rule
 - Meanwhile, Jesus is the Son of the Father of Lights, the perfect representation of God in Heaven
 - He is innocent and righteous in every way, and all who are born again by faith in Jesus are children of God and share in His nature
 - That was the choice standing before the crowd that day: choose righteousness or sin, life or death, God or Satan
 - And as Paul tells us in Romans, the crowd could not make the right choice:

[Rom. 3:10](#) as it is written,

"THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

[Rom. 3:11](#) **THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,**

THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

[Rom. 3:12](#) **ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;**

THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,

THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

- Each of these men stood as the perfect examples of the two types of people in the world
 - Barabbas was the picture of every unbeliever, dead in his sins, in constant rebellion to God and His word, and due death

- While Jesus represents those who have been born again by faith, counted righteous yet hated by the world
- As should be obvious, God has prepared this entire scene in every detail to make clear that Jesus represents a fork in our spiritual road
 - Every human being finds him or herself on one side of this moment or the other
 - There is no third choice...like that crowd, we have to pick our Yeshua, so to speak
 - Spiritually speaking, either our “Barabbas” dies and we live to Christ, or we reject the son of God and remain dead in our sins
- So Pilate declares his verdict, and in v.24 he ceremonially washes his hands of the decision, declaring Jesus’ blood was on the Jews and their children, not him
 - To be clear, this little ceremony Pilate performed before the crowd on that day didn’t absolve him of his guilt, not one bit
 - We don’t get to decide for ourselves which of our decisions God will hold against us and which ones He won’t
 - Five times Pilate declared Jesus was an innocent man, and yet he has Jesus scourged and ultimately crucified anyway
 - Pilate tortured and killed a man he knew to be innocent, and why? Because he feared losing his job over a riot on Passover
 - And his little ceremony at the end certainly didn’t lessen his guilt
 - Ironically, not only did Pilate not succeed in escaping his guilt, he also failed to preserve his position over Judea
 - History records that Pilate lost his job a few years later when Caligula removed Pilate from his office
 - Pilate was probably manipulated into some bad decision by the religious leaders so the Caesar banished him to Gaul (France)
 - Gaul was not a vacation spot...it was a Roman region under constant raids by barbarians, ripe with disease and not a desirable post
 - History records that Pilate committed suicide while in Gaul, a fitting end for the man who killed the Messiah of God

- Both the man who betrayed the Lord and the man who acted on that betrayal both died by their own hand
- Pilate knew the right thing to do and yet chose to sin anyway for something he wanted, but then he tries to have his cake and eat it too by excusing his choice
 - In that respect, I think Pilate serves as a poster child for how the unbelieving world looks at sin in general
 - The world wants its sin because of what it gains them, yet no one thinks they play a part in any wrong doing
 - And when they are caught and have no choice but to admit their part, they excuse it away
 - They say it wasn't their choice, or they claim the act was made necessary by another's sin, or they shift the blame some way
 - Just remember, you can't wash your hands of sin...the only thing that washes away your sin is the blood of Christ who died for you
 - So in the words of that wise philosopher, Bob Dylan, you're gonna have to serve somebody, God or Satan
 - And someone will pay the price for your sin...either you pay your own price or you let Jesus pay it for you
 - And what of the Jewish leaders who conspired to see Jesus die, including persuading the crowds to call for Jesus' death?
 - In John 19:11 Jesus tells Pilate at one moment that those who turned Him over to Pilate were guilty of a greater sin than Pilate
 - We don't know how exactly God differentiates between varying levels of sin and punishment but He does
 - And the religious leaders were due an even greater punishment than Pilate when that day came
- And what about the Jewish crowd that called for Jesus' death on that day?
 - Notice in v.25 the people say to Pilate they will accept the guilt on themselves and their children for that day's decision
 - And here again, the choice to accept or reject guilt was not theirs to make, for they were certainly guilty regardless

- And their decision had very severe and longterm consequences for the nation of Israel
- In Matthew 12, we studied the moment when the official representatives of Israel, the Pharisees, rejected Jesus' claims as Messiah
 - They committed the unpardonable sin, Jesus called it, by declaring the testimony of the Spirit to be the work of Satan
 - As a result of that sin, Jesus said that this generation of Israel lost their opportunity to receive their King
 - The Kingdom would not come to Israel in that day, nor will it come to Israel in the future until they call upon His name
- Now we see the next step in that judgment playing out as the people declare openly and repeatedly Jesus is not their king
 - In Chapter 12 it was the religious leaders speaking on behalf of the people, but now the people themselves speak judgment
 - As they proclaimed Jesus was not their king, that generation of Israel lost the Kingdom promised to Israel
 - And in a few decades, they lost their temple, their city and their place in the land...all judgments that God brought for this sin
- But this is not the end of God's plan for Israel, for even when we are faithless, God remains faithful the Bible teaches
 - And in a future day at the end of this age, the Bible teaches that another generation of Israel will reverse this mistake
 - A future generation of Israel, all Jews who are alive on a certain day, will return to Jesus in trembling and repentance

Hos. 3:4 For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols.

Hos. 3:5 Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days.

Rom. 11:25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery – so that you will not be wise in your own estimation – that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;

Rom. 11:26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,

**“THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,
HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.”**

**[Rom. 11:27](#) “THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,
WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.”**

- The Bible tells of a day at the end of this age when all Jews remaining on earth will be moved by the Spirit of God to confess Christ
 - As Paul says, the Lord will come from the Heavenly Zion to earth to remove ungodliness from Jacob, Israel
 - But God promised to take away Israel’s sins in the covenant He made with them, so they will receive His grace in that day
- What an amazing display of God’s sovereignty working through the sin of humanity to accomplish good on that day?
 - Everyone involved was acting out of sinful hearts with evil motives, and yet all were under the authority and control of God
 - From the Jewish leaders who plotted to save Israel by killing their rival but ended up ensuring Israel’s destruction
 - To Pilate who knew the right thing to do but knowingly condemned an innocent man to save his job...and lost it anyway
 - To Claudia who acted to help her husband and Jesus with her warning but ended up sealing Jesus’ fate
 - To Barabbas who must have rejoiced being freed in place of Jesus yet who served as the representative of all that is ungodly
 - To Jesus, the only innocent One in the scene, Who said nothing and did nothing to defend Himself, yet lost everything for our sake
 - Next week we study through the beginning of Jesus’ crucifixion
 - And as we do, we’ll return to the question I posed a few weeks ago...why did Jesus need to suffer on the way to His death?