

## Preaching Copy: John 18:36-40 "Not This Man, But Barabbas"

Midweek Lenten Service #4

Wednesday, March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022

### Text: John 18:36-40

<sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."

<sup>37</sup> Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world---to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." <sup>38</sup> Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him. <sup>39</sup> But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" <sup>40</sup> They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

### Exegetical Statement

John gives us the account of Jesus trial before Pilate. The Sanhedrin had found Him guilty of blasphemy, claiming to be the Messiah and equal to God. They wanted Him sentenced to death but didn't have the authority to give the death sentence. So they take Him before Pilate, originally just charging Him vaguely as an evildoer. When Pilate refuses to take the case, seeing no offense against Roman Law, they lie and claim He was fomenting insurrection against Caesar. Pilate takes His case and questions Him to see if He really was claiming to be the ruler of the Jews. Jesus responds that He is a king, but His reign and rule is not over an earthly kingdom. The truth that He offers to give Pilate is that He is the God in human form who rules over all men and desires to save all men. Pilate has heard a lot of different truth claims in the world and is not interested in another. Still, he knows Jesus is innocent. He tries to bypass the Sanhedrin's railroading of Jesus by appealing to the crowd to release Jesus as the designated prisoner of release for Passover. But the Sanhedrin has worked up the crowd to ask for a true insurrectionist guilty of robbery and murder: Barabbas. In a total violation of justice, the real criminal goes free while the guilty will die.

### Focus Statement:

Just as Jesus took the place and punishment of the real criminal Barabbas, unjustly charged with the very thing he was guilty of, He takes your charges of sin that label you an insurrectionist against God. He takes your justly deserved punishment so that you, the guilty one, go free. His gift of grace and love through His suffering, death, and resurrection

### Function Statement:

#### Why it's important to know:

Just as Barabbas was to justly receive the punishment he earned of suffering and death. We too are guilty of insurrection against God. We sin by assuming the reign and rule of our own lives and demote God to an advisory role, if even that. We deserve present and eternal punishment.

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

See ourselves as the guilty ones who get to go free because Jesus stood in and took the punishment we deserve. We have been freed from our death sentence forever. We live in that Gospel Freedom, realizing that all sinful charges, through true, have been dropped and we are continued to be declared innocent

### Subject Sentence: The guilty go free because sinless Jesus was punished

## Introduction: Greatest Travesty Of Justice

Shalom! I'm so glad your Pastor invited me back tonight to speak with you. I want to tell you the story of one of the greatest travesties of justice that ever happened, and I was an eyewitness to it. Now, I'm sure you've heard countless stories of those who were innocent yet were found guilty and did time for crimes they did not commit. And I'm sure you've also heard stories where the guilty have been set free, sometimes because a judge was paid off, or sometimes because witnesses lied, Your Pastor told me something about a case where "The glove didn't fit, so they must acquit". (Not sure what that one meant). While you all live in a different where and when than I, somethings don't change. But the true story I'm going to tell tonight tops them all. It's the story of how evil men successfully undermined the Roman judicial system, which was a system based not solely on the judge's subjective feelings, but instead upon the laws of the land. It was a system that, while not perfect, was this basis on how you judge the guilt and innocence your people today.

### The Text

My story tonight begins where last week's account left off. Jesus is bound as a prisoner and taken before the high priest Caiaphas, who had gathered the ruling council which we called the Sanhedrin. These men were given power and authority by Rome to judge some civil matters, especially as pertained to our Jewish system of laws, which were different than Roman Law. The Council's mission was to prove that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy, that as a man He claimed to be equal with God. So, when Caiaphas put Jesus under oath in the name of the LORD God Almighty to answer if He was or was not the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus answered truthfully "I AM". And Jesus went on further saying (**Matthew 26:64**) **"You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."** With this they had all the evidence they needed. Jewish Law called for the death of anyone claiming to be God, and in Jesus' claim to be seated at God's right hand fulfilled that claim. For this they wanted Jesus to die a slow and horrible death. But the Sanhedrin didn't have the power to use capital punishment. So they needed Him to be judged guilty in the Roman court of law where the sentence of death by crucifixion could be carried out.

At daybreak that Friday morning the Sanhedrin and their temple guards took Jesus, still bound, to the Governor's official residence at the palace in Jerusalem. The Roman court was open from dawn to dusk, and the presiding judge was the governor of Judea, Pilate himself. When they arrived, Pilate came out and said in his official capacity, "What charge do you bring against this man?" But the Sanhedrin was afraid to give an honest answer. They had found Him guilty of blasphemy which deserved death by Jewish Law. But that was not a chargeable offense by Roman Law, which recognized not just one god, but a pantheon full. So the rulers evasively responded, "Listen, this man is guilty of doing evil. If he wasn't, we wouldn't have brought Him here to hand over to you." Now Pilate tolerated these Jewish rulers in order to keep the peace. But their religious laws didn't matter to him, and from his past dealings with them he knew them to be dishonest snakes. So he called their bluff telling them, "Take Him yourself and judge Him according to your law", meaning 'Unless He has committed a crime against Roman Law get Him and yourselves out of my face.'

The Sanhedrin had to come up with something to charge Him with that would be an offense against Roman law. So, they lied and said that Jesus was guilty of fomenting insurrection among the people, telling them not to pay taxes to Caesar, but instead to follow Him as King of the Jews. These were lies, bald faced lies! I was there in the temple when Jesus was asked if people should pay taxes to Rome, and He held up a Roman denarius with Caesar's picture on it saying, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and give to God what is God's" Never ever once did He preach that we should rebel against the Roman authorities! For goodness' sake, in the Garden when they came to arrest Him, Jesus that told Peter to put his sword back. But once they made these charges, Pilate had to deal with them.

Pilate took Him into the Governor's residence to begin formal questioning. This was not Pilate operating in secret. Roman court proceedings are open to the public. But these hypocrites refused to enter because, while they had no problem falsely charging an innocent man, they didn't want to defile themselves by entering a Gentile's residence and so be ceremonially defiled and unable to eat the Passover Meal later that day. Those hypocrites had no problem as the religious leaders of the people breaking the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment, they didn't see that as becoming defiled.

Pilate began with the most important charge, and asked Him "Do You Yourself claim to be The King of the Jews?" Now to the Jews the title "**THE** King of the Jews" was Messianic, another way of saying Jesus was God's Anointed One, the One promised in the line of King David. Jesus was that for certain. But the Sanhedrin charged Him with being "**A** King of the Jews", a false Messiah, a false King. They refused to believe He was the Messiah sent by God Himself. So Jesus, as He so often did to make the questioner think more closely, asked Pilate, "Are you asking me this because you yourself think I might be that king? Or are you repeating what others have claimed I am?" And further "Do you know what you are asking?"

Pilate responded annoyed saying, 'I'm not one of these Jews! How should I know what You are! It is your fellow countrymen that are bringing this charge. So, tell me, what have you done?' Jesus responded as the truthful witness He always was. He told Pilate "My kingdom is not of this world." What He meant was that He truly is a king. We confess Him to be "The King of Kings and Lord of Lords." He is God the Son incarnate who reigns and rules over all kingdoms and all peoples. But His reign and rule isn't like that of Caesar in Rome. As God He reigns and rules through Caesar, and through Pontius Pilate, so that God's will is done even through unbelievers. They ultimately receive their power and authority from Him, as given to Him by the Father. But this is more than Pilate could take in at this time.

So, Jesus continued, "If My Kingdom was of this world, like Caesar's is, or even as your authority is, then I would have servants that fought to keep me from being arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. But that didn't happen, because My Kingdom, My reign and rule, is not of this world."

Pilate then asked Him, "So then, You are a king?" Jesus responded, "You yourself are saying I'm a king", meaning you're calling me a king by your own definition. But that definition doesn't fit what and who I AM. I Myself have come into this world, born into it in order that I would give witness to the truth. Those who are willing to accept the truth are willing to hear what I have to testify to." And what was that truth this King of Kings came to testify to? That He is the King of the Universe, the Word, made flesh who had come to save all men from sin, death, and hell, even Pilate. That He is the Way, the Truth, and the Lie. Unfortunately, Pilate was a man of the world. He had heard a lot of truth claims from a lot of different people. And now this backwoods Jew is talking about witnessing to some universal truth? Pilate showed his inability to believe or hear Jesus' witness, to accept the reign and rule Jesus had to bring to Pilate's heart. Unbelieving Pilate simply responded, "What is truth!"

Pilate took Jesus back out to face His accusers. He did this knowing that He was not guilty of the insurrection they had charged Him with. Pilate sensed that it was jealousy at work in the heart of the chief priests and rulers that made them seek Jesus' death. Pilate could just look at the man before Him and see that He was nothing special; certainly not anybody claiming to be any kind of a king. But how could he circumvent the railroading job the Sanhedrin was trying to work?

It was then that someone in the assembled crowd mentioned releasing a prisoner. Yes, Pilate thought! The annual release of a prisoner convicted and sentenced as an olive branch to these Jews as they celebrated their release from being prisoner slaves in Egypt in ancient times. So he said to them, "It is a custom to release a prisoner to you at Passover. Shall I release to you this man; the King of the Jews?" Pilate thought that certainly Jesus followers would speak up for His release. But the Sanhedrin had been working the crowd, and those who welcomed Him as their Messiah on Sunday now cry for the release of Barabbas, and the crucifixion of Jesus.

## **The Guilty Go Free While the Innocent Dies**

Barabbas! In your Bibles the word I used to describe him is translated as robber. But I don't want you to think of him like those train robbers from your past who flash a gun, take the loot, and leave everyone unharmed. He was like the robbers in Jesus' parable about the Good Samaritan, who attack an unarmed man, pulverize him, and leave him for dead. Barabbas was the kind of thief who wouldn't hesitate to resort to violence. In fact that was why he was in prison awaiting to be crucified. He joined with some Zealots who were seeking to begin a movement to overthrow Roman rule. He was charged not only with insurrection but also for murder. That's the kind of man Barabbas was. That's the kind of man the chief priests and Sanhedrin moved the people to call for his freedom.

Think of the irony here! Jesus was charged with insurrection against Rome because they said He claimed to be a king in place of Caesar, when He had never done anything of the kind. The religious leaders want to send Him to death by crucifixion. And here they are advocating for a criminal who actually did commit the crimes being attributed to Jesus, and crimes that were even worse, and he is going to be set free. Where is the justice in that? How's that for the scales of justice unfairly tipped?

Let's take it even further. What about the scales of justice regarding you and I before God? You may argue that you are not a murderer. But what about the charge of insurrection? How often in your life do you assume control and make God take a backseat? Barabbas disregarded the authority that God Himself had put in place at that time to keep the peace. He wanted anything but peace. When we break God's laws are we not doing the very same thing? In God's eyes all sin is worthy of the punishment of eternal death, Barabbas murder, as well as our failure to love God and love one another with our words and actions.

Jesus would go to the cross, suffer and die in place of Barabbas who got to go free. That's God's justice working alongside with God's grace and mercy. Jesus went to the cross to suffer and die in your place and mine, and that too is God's justice working alongside God's grace and mercy. He took all your charges of insurrection so that you would never be charged, never be punished. He is the sinless one who became sin, became the guilty one, so that you might become the righteousness of God. He not only sets you free from eternal death and condemnation, but brings you into His reign and rule, His kingdom, His watchful care that extend over all things now and forever. He is a king. He is The King. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who is your Savior.

## **Conclusion**

Next time travesties of injustice touch your life, the life of someone around you, the world around you; when the wheels of justice seem to be faltering, remember God's justice tempered with His mercy and grace. When you think the Barabbas's of the world are getting off scot free, remember who the LORD God is. He is the God of justice who must punish sin. But He is also the God of grace and mercy, who willingly took the punishment of all mankind upon Himself. He is the Lord God who desires all to know Him and come to a knowledge of the truth, to the knowledge of faith in His Son Jesus Christ. He desires to call all into His kingdom of eternal grace and eternal life. On the Last Day all who stand outside that Kingdom will suffer for their crimes eternally. But those who are in His kingdom by grace through faith, get off scot free. That's something to rest your hope and faith in. It's something that is worthy of sharing with those around you so that they too might join you in His gracious reign and rule now and into eternity. Until next time: Shalom!