

Written Copy: John 19:7-12 “Who’s to Blame?”

Midweek Lenten Service #5

Wednesday, April 6th, 2022

Text: John 19:7-12

⁷ The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." ⁸ When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. ⁹ He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" ¹¹ Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin." ¹² From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar."

Exegetical Statement

The religious leaders have stirred up the crowd so that they call for Barabbas release, foiling Pilate’s plan of releasing Jesus, who he believes is innocent of the charge of insurrection. But he has a new idea in mind. He directs Jesus to be mercilessly flogged, then dresses Him up mocking His alleged kingship, hoping the crowd will see the ridiculousness of their charge, and that Jesus’ punishment would satisfy their cry for the death sentence. But the chief priests and temple guards begin the cry for crucifixion. Pilate responds that he finds the man not guilty, and that the only way He will be crucified is if they were to do it themselves, which is impossible, the Sanhedrin cannot enforce the death penalty. Finally the religious leaders come clean with the real reason they want the death penalty: Jesus has declared Himself to be the Son of God. Pilate had been afraid that these proceedings could get out of hand, and that his authority as the Roman judge of law was being usurped. Now he hears that this strange man could be demigod among men. Pilate takes him back for additional questioning aimed at this by asking where He came from, this King who testified that His kingdom is not of this world. But Jesus has already offered him the truth which he refused. Pilate then becomes aggravated with Jesus’ refusal to answer, and claims authority to release or crucify, therefore Jesus better answer. Jesus truthfully witnesses that neither the Sanhedrin or Pilate, or Caesar for that matter are the source of authority, the power they do have to rule comes from God in heaven, and He is working through them to accomplish His will set forth from the Fall of mankind. Both Pilate and the Sanhedrin carry guilt for the travesty of justice that is about to happen, but the Sanhedrin more so since they have the testimony of the Scriptures. Finally Pilate must pronounce judgement and takes his seat in the judge’s bench. One last time he calls them to behold this man they want to punish for being their king. They respond with a renewed demand for crucifixion. Pilate asks “Do you really want me to crucify your king? And the chief priests reveal the sinful unbelief ruling their heart when they lie and claim they have no king but Caesar. Pilate, fearing for his livelihood if he is convicted of a riot over releasing a traitor, caves into their wishes.

Focus Statement:

God the Father works through sinful unbelieving men to provide the salvation He promised when mankind first fell. Jesus is the offspring of Eve in the flesh, but is also the Creator God who must suffer in the flesh to save us from our sins of the flesh by His suffering, death, and resurrection. His goal is to restore His fallen creation, body and soul, sinful flesh and soul, back to Himself

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

Pilate denies what he knows to be the truth about Jesus and condemns an innocent man to death to save himself. The Sanhedrin manipulates Pilate so that the one who truly is their Messianic King is put to death for witnessing to the truth. We too deny the truth about Jesus before the world to save our own skin

What the hearer should do as a result:

Confess when we deny our faith for selfish reasons of preservation. See Jesus’ sacrifice as taking our punishment so that by the grace of God we are not condemned but restored as His precious creatures.

Introduction: Who's to Blame for Jesus' Death?

Faithful brothers and sisters who gather to worship our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: I am thankful to be in your midst this one last time. Your Pastor has allowed me to come and describe to you the events leading up to Jesus being led away to be crucified on that hill outside of Jerusalem. I know your Pastor plans on covering that part of Jesus' suffering and death next week. My job tonight is to finish telling you how it is that an innocent man would be made to suffer the death penalty and consider who's responsible for this travesty of justice.

The Text

I'm going to pick up where I left off last week. Pilate, who did not believe Jesus was guilty of the crime of treason, which the Jewish officials were accusing Him of, was trying to release Jesus as the prisoner released at Passover. That failed when the religious leaders worked up the crowd to demand the notorious criminal Barabbas be released instead. So Pilate came up with another idea.

Pilate wanted the religious leaders and the crowd to see Jesus the way he saw him. He wanted them to understand that to accuse this broken figure of a man of claiming to be their King, and trying to lead a revolt, was the height of sheer stupidity. He was also waging that if he inflicted enough punishment on Jesus by taking him to the verge of death without quite killing Him, their anger and call for His death might be quieted. So Pilate ordered that Jesus be publicly flogged. This was done in outside in the courtyard of Pilate's residence where Jesus' accusers could watch the scene. He was stripped of His clothes with only His undergarment on. He was then made to kneel in front of a pillar with His hands secured around it so He could not move. Then, using a leather whip with shards of jagged metal sown into the ends of it, He was whipped repeatedly. The leather straps of the whip hit his body on the sides, and as the whip was pulled back the metal shards dug into His skin, tearing gashes in His body. It was horrible beyond what I can describe to you. The pain is intense and unimaginable. And they just kept whipping Him and whipping Him until His back and sides were shredded. They kept at it until Pilate told them to stop, until he thought that if they continued anymore Jesus might succumb to death.

Then Pilate ordered Him taken back inside the Governor's palace. He told the cohort of soldiers that they should recognize this King of the Jews in a manner befitting Him. Now the Emperors of Rome used to wear a laurel wreath for a crown. So the soldiers mockingly made for Him a wreath of thorns and shoved it down on top of his head so that the thorns cut into His scalp and caused the blood to flow just as it already was from His sides and back. Then they threw over His lacerated back a purple cloak, mocking the alleged royalty of this "supposed King". Then each soldier took their turn walking up to Him, mockingly greeting Him, "Hail, King of the Jews", and then giving Him a hard slap across His face.

Finally, when Pilate decided He was sufficiently punished he came back out to face the waiting Jews. He informs them that as the judge of Roman law in Jerusalem and Judea, he has found Jesus not guilty of breaking any Roman laws. Then to show them that Jesus had been sufficiently punished for whatever transgression He has made against their law, he brought Jesus out, still wearing the crown of thorns and purple robe, looking battered, bloody, and beaten. Pilate called their attention to this spectacle saying, "Behold! The man!"

But instead of any kind of cry for mercy, or agreement that justice had been served, the chief priests and temple guards begin to cry out "Crucify! Crucify!" They wanted more than just this merciless beating, they want the death penalty. They want Jesus to suffer the slow and agonizing death that is crucifixion, where one finally succumbs to death when they can no longer push up with their legs to draw in breath. It is the death that was reserved for the worst kind of criminals, the most painful death imaginable. And only that would satisfy them.

Pilate's patience with these Jewish religious leaders has grown very thin. He realizes they are trying to manipulate him, and he doesn't like it. He is the governor and as such he is the final word on who is guilty of breaking Roman law and what punishment they deserve. He should've just told them point blank that Jesus has suffered enough, and he is going to release Him. And if anyone wanted to disagree with his proclamation the Roman cohort of soldiers would convince them otherwise with their swords. Of course this could turn into a riot in a city overflowing with Jews who are celebrating their release from subjugation by another world power, Egypt. These are a people who may be ripe to rise up and see if their God won't free them again from Roman Rule.

Pilate has a right to be afraid of a riot. Not so much because his soldiers couldn't eventually put it down, but it would be a bloody mess. And word of it would most certainly get back to Rome, and Pilate couldn't afford letting that happen. You see, Pilate was not born into the upper class from whom most rulers and those in positions of power are chosen. He was born into the middle class and was just a soldier, that is until the granddaughter of Caesar Augustus herself, the Roman Emperor fell in love with Pilate and married him. Because of this inside connection Pilate was given the position of governor of Judea. Now the current Emperor Tiberius was sick at that time. On top of that he was not a patient man and had the reputation of turning savagely on his underlings who messed up. He was suspicious of them scheming to usurp his power. If he received word that Pilate not only couldn't keep the peace, but allowed an alleged traitor to go free, losing his position as governor might be the least of Pilate's worries.

Pilate, fed up with the corner these Jewish leaders were backing him into said with disgust, "I'm not crucifying this man. If you want it done that bad, then go do it yourself". The unspoken truth of this would be that Pilate have the Jesus problem solved, and he could then charge them of being guilty of murder and crucify them! Oh how he would love to nail them to a cross and see them suffer for all they are putting him through! He once again tells them that Jesus is not guilty of breaking any law, especially one that would call for His death.

At this point the Jews finally come forward with the truth. They tell Pilate, "You may have no law that proclaims His guilt, but we do. By our laws, which Caesar has charged you with upholding, this man ought to die because He has declared Himself to be the Son of God. Now Pilate doesn't understand how this relates to Jewish Messianic prophecy. But as one who is grew up with the Roman teaching that there are many gods, and even demigods: gods who are part human, this sheds new light on who this man before him might be. Pilate was fearful before this on how mishandling this case might bring his downfall. But now, if the gods themselves are involved, he could be in a world of hurt.

So he takes Jesus back into the Governor's palace to question Him further. He asks Jesus "Where exactly are you from?" Meaning "What kind of god are you?" But Jesus doesn't answer these questions. Jesus has already offered the truth to Pilate earlier, but he didn't care to hear it, instead passing off the offer with his comment "What is truth?" Jesus' refusal to answer angers Pilate. That anger couple with fear moves him to burst out "To me, in my position as Governor, will you not respond? Don't you realize that your life is in my hands? I can order your release, or I can order your death." Jesus responds to correct Pilate on who is really in charge. The one who is really calling the shots is the Heavenly Father. It is He Himself who has arranged for Tiberius to be the Emperor, Pilate to be the governor, Caiaphas and the other members of the Sanhedrin to have their positions of power, and for His Beloved Son to stand before them and be sent to His death. All that is happening, even though Pilate may see himself being manipulated by these Jews, and even as the Jews see themselves as manipulating things and calling the shots. All of this is fulfilling the will and plan of the LORD God Himself. It is the Lord working through sinful men to accomplish and fulfill His plan of salvation for all mankind. All authority comes from the LORD God Himself.

As a result Pilate is moved by an even greater desire to obtain the release of Jesus. He goes back outside to face the crowd and argue with them. Of course as the judge who has the authority within himself to acquit or condemn, when he feels it necessary to enter into an argument or negotiations with the accusers, that means that He has already succumbed to their manipulation of justice. And the Jews show this by playing their trump card. They cry out "If you release this traitor, you are showing yourself to be a traitor too. You are showing the world that you are no friend of Caesar's, for anyone who makes himself out to be a King takes a traitorous stance against Caesar."

Now Pilate is stuck. He's caught deep in a trap of his own making. The Jews have him just where they want him. So he brings the prisoner out and takes his seat in the judgment chair where he will pass judgement and sentence on Jesus. He tries one last time to squirm his way out from under this trap, not to save an innocent man from death, but save himself from the fix he is in. He calls their attention to this beaten and bloody figure that no longer resembles a man and says "Behold! Your king! Look at Him, look at the One you accuse of leading insurrection! There's no way this man could do that!" But then the entire crowd responds adamantly and viciously "Take Him away! Take Him away! Crucify Him!" One last time Pilate interjects "Do you really want me to crucify your king?" And the chief priests answer "We have no king but Caesar". And the game is over. Jesus will be handed over to be crucified.

Who is to Blame?

So, where does the fault lie for this travesty of justice? How is it that the man charged with upholding Roman law meant to protect the innocent allows an innocent man to be condemned to death? Pilate is certainly at fault. He is unwilling and unable to rise up to the occasion and do the right thing. In fact he shows his inability to handle the job of governor because he has no interest in justice or upholding Caesar's rule. He is only interested in himself.

The same is true of the chief priests and the Sanhedrin. They are supposed to lead the people in living according to God's laws and commands and yet they blatantly disregard them; they give false testimony about an innocent man and then are complicit in His murder. Where does the problem lie with them? The problem lies in their hearts. They have no interest in worshipping God or obeying Him. These religious leaders of all people should've realized that the ultimate authority for all things comes from the LORD God. And yet they give witness to their heart condition when they confess we have no King but Caesar. And the real truth of the matter is the one ruling in their hearts is themselves.

And who else is to blame? You and I. We all at times refuse obey the reign and rule of God in our hearts when His will makes us uncomfortable or means we may have to suffer. We are guilty of insurrection against the Lord God when we refused to witness our faith in word and action. We assume the rule over our own lives when we sin against God by following what our sinful heart wants, instead of what God wants and calls us to do.

Jesus was the innocent man condemned to death on behalf of Pilate, the Sanhedrin, on behalf of me, and on behalf of you. The Father who has all authority set all this in motion to make sure that His Only Son, the only innocent man ever to live, was condemned to suffer the most horrible of death. It was for you, to save you from suffering forever in eternal hell what you justly should because of your sins. And our Lord and Savior willingly and obediently suffered all this, because of His love for the Father and the greatest of love for you, so that you should never be condemned to an eternity of suffering that makes crucifixion pale in comparison, but instead so that you and I might enjoy the pleasures of eternal life.

Conclusion

My time has grown short. I pray that in all that I have told you I've given you food for thought and meditation. I pray that you ponder these things, as horrible as they are. May they serve to prepare you for the Easter celebration to come. That as you relive Jesus' suffering and death on the cross you are brought to see the real nature of your sin, how offensive it is in the eyes of the Father, and then see the wonder of our Savior's sacrifice of love for you. I pray the end goal is that your Easter praise and celebration will be more heartfelt and all the more joyous, and that the wonder and love of Jesus' sacrifice move you ever closer in your faith relationship with Him. Until we meet again on that Last Day: Shalom!