

"Were You There When Jesus Was Condemned?"—
Matthew 27:24-26

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "Were You There When Jesus Was Condemned?", is Matthew 27:24-26 → *When Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered Him to be crucified.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

The search for truth and justice seems to be a never-ending journey for perpetrators, victims, lawyers and law enforcement investigators—at least, it seems, until a final judgment is made in court. Even then there may be higher courts to which one may appeal for justice. We even hear of the "re-opening" of cases years following the court's judgment in an effort to determine if justice was served properly. Trying to determine the truth in the midst of crimes done in secret, along with the inability to read one's mind and motives, is difficult. Depending upon the testimony of the "witnesses" involved can also be difficult because one must prove the

truth of their testimony as well. Putting objective empirical evidence together is very difficult, to say the least.

In our text we have no ordinary case of mistaken justice but a deliberate plot to kill the sinless Son of God. When Jesus was presented to Pilate by the religious leaders of the Jews, the Gospel accounts give us a picture of him trying to determine the truth about this man. These leaders were not seeking justice to be served in bringing Jesus to Pilate. In fact, Pilate seemed surprised that they even involved him. *Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and judge Him by your own law."* *The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death."* (cf. John 18:31) They didn't want a trial . . . they wanted Pilate to sentence Him to death by crucifixion. They stated their desire clearly.

Upon what could Pilate make such a judgment of condemnation? The accusations provided by the Jewish leaders recorded in Luke 23:2? → *We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a king. Come, come . . .* Pilate knew these men could care less about the Roman government, especially paying taxes to Caesar. Matthew 27:18 says *he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered Jesus up to him.*

Upon what could Pilate make such a judgment of condemnation? Could he rely on his questioning of Jesus Himself? It is very probable he didn't understand most of Jesus' answers, especially when Jesus told

him that His *kingdom was not from this world* (cf. John 18:36) and the purpose for which He *was born and came into the world was to bear witness to the truth*. Then Jesus added: *Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice*. (cf. John 18:37) Not much to go on when looking for proof upon which to sentence a man to death. To the psych ward maybe, but not to death!

Could he rely on logically processing the evidence in order to condemn Jesus to death? His conclusion was that Jesus had done no evil (cf. Matthew 27:23) and he could *find no guilt in Him*. (cf. John 18:38) Then his wife got involved according to Matthew 27:19 → *While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of Him today in a dream."* Really? He is supposed to decide a man's fate based upon a dream? No wonder Pilate asked the question in John 18:38 → ***What is truth?***

Verse 24 of our text records Pilate acting hypocritically in a dramatic display of his fear and confusion over condemning to death one whom he knew to be innocent. *He took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."* Was he? Was he truly innocent of Jesus' blood?

Maybe this was a last "ditch effort" on his part to release Jesus, thinking that the Sanhedrin would certainly not claim responsibility for

His death. He had tried by offering to release Jesus according to a Jewish custom during the Passover but they chose the release of Barabbas instead. (cf. Matthew 27:15-18; Mark 15:6-14; Luke 23:18-21; John 18:39-40). It may be that presenting a flogged Jesus before them was a way to get the crowd to have mercy on Him and let Pilate release Him. Instead *they cried out, "Crucify Him!"* (cf. John 19:1-5) Despite his efforts Pilate still declared his innocence while condemning an innocent man to death. Interestingly enough, *all the people in the crowd* were willing to take responsibility for His death and claim, *His blood be on us and on our children!* (Verse 25)

True to form, the sinful human nature displays the depth of its depravity in the condemnation of Jesus in Pilate's court. Sure, you see it in the hypocritical self-righteousness of the Sanhedrin; in the abusive mockery of the soldiers; in the inhuman torture of His flogging; and in the choice of the release of a convicted criminal over an innocent man. The depravity of sin was not just about acting unjustly toward someone. It was being willing to kill an innocent person and then claim in the words of Pilate, "I am innocent." It was being willing to kill an innocent person and then feel so secure in faith to think that *His blood can be on us and on our children* without any divine retribution.

Were you there when Jesus was condemned? These people in the text do not stand alone for we find the depravity of sin at work amongst

us today in hatred, disrespect of God Will, false accusations, envy, a false spiritual security and dishonesty in arrogant pride. It is there when you are condemned in your sin and still stack words upon words to justify your innocence rather than confess your sin. It is there when you choose to go directly against God's Will thinking that nothing can touch you, including God Himself. It is there when people cling in defiance against God because He has not met up to their expectations in life. They condemn Him and claim, "I am innocent!" It is even expressed in the self-righteous judgments upon others.

Yet, in the midst of experiencing the depths of the depravity of sin Jesus stood before His true Judge—Yahweh—ready to do whatever was necessary to deal with our sin once and for all. He stood willing to suffer the penalty which our sins deserved in the judgment of our just Judge—Yahweh. All this injustice and suffering was nothing compared to experiencing the separation in hell from His heavenly Father when He cried out while on the cross: *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?* (cf. Matthew 27:46) He did it all so that you will not have to stand before God on the Last Day condemned to suffer eternally in hell.

As you experience this presence at Jesus' condemnation it leads you to trust in His suffering and death for the forgiveness of your sins in all their depravity. It leads to confess your sin before God by admitting that you have *trampled underfoot the Son of God, and . . . profaned the*

blood of the covenant by which you were sanctified. (cf. Hebrews 10:29) In such humble submission to the Lord Jesus you get to hear the promise of His Word to you from Romans 8:1 → *There is . . . now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

In this new forgiven and sanctified life, empowered by the Holy Spirit, you can view others through the eyes of Jesus rather than through eyes of self-righteous condemnation. You can be patient and forgiving toward others, by defending your neighbor and putting the best construction on what he does. You can follow the command of Jesus in John 7:24 → *Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.* It is the *right judgment* upon sin which desires the sinner to trust in the condemnation of sin in the Person & Work of Jesus so we can be forgiven and freed from sin now and forever! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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