

Matthew 27:1-26

1 Very early the next morning all the chief priests and Jewish elders decided how to arrange for the Romans to execute Jesus. 2 They tied his hands and took him to Pilate, the Roman governor.

After Judas returned the money and hanged himself, the Jewish leaders bought a field with the money, in fulfillment of prophecy.

3 When Judas, the one who had enabled Jesus' enemies to seize him, realized that they had decided to have Jesus executed, he was very sorry about what he had done. He took the thirty coins back to the chief priests and elders. 4 He said, "I have sinned. I have betrayed a man who is innocent." They replied, "That means nothing to us! That is your problem!" 5 So Judas took the money and threw it inside the Temple. Then he went away and hanged himself.

6 Later the high priests found the coins. They picked them up and said, "This is money that we paid to have a man killed, and our law does not allow such money to be put into the Temple treasury." 7 So they decided to use that money to buy the field where clay was dug for making pots. They made that field a place where they buried strangers who died in Jerusalem. 8 That is why that place is still called "The field of blood".

9 By buying that field, they fulfilled these words that the prophet Jeremiah wrote long ago:

They took the thirty silver coins; that was what the leaders of Israel decided that he was worth; 10 and with that money they bought the field where clay was dug for potters. They did that as the Lord had commanded me.

11 Jesus stood in front of Pilate, the governor. The governor asked Jesus, "Do you claim to be the king of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "It is as you have just said."

12 When he was accused by the chief priests and elders about various things, he did not answer. 13 So Pilate said to him, "You hear how many things they are saying to accuse you; are you not going to reply?"

14 But even though he was not guilty, Jesus did not say anything. He did not reply to any of the things about which they were accusing him. As a result, the governor was very surprised.

15 It was the governor's custom each year during the Passover celebration to release one person who was in prison. He released whatever prisoner the people wanted. 16 At that time there was in Jerusalem a well-known prisoner whose name was Barabbas.

17 So when the crowd gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which prisoner would you like me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus, whom some of you claim to be the Messiah?" 18 He asked that question because he realized that the chief priests wanted to have Jesus executed. They had brought Jesus to him only because they were jealous of Jesus. And Pilate thought that the crowd would prefer that he release Jesus.

19 While Pilate was sitting on the platform where he made judicial decisions, his wife sent him this message: "Early this morning I had a bad dream because of that man. So do not condemn that righteous man!"

20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the crowd to ask Pilate to release Barabbas, and to order that his soldiers execute Jesus. 21 So when the governor asked them, "Which of the two men do you want me to release for you?" They replied, "Barabbas!"

22 Pilate, very astonished, asked, "So what shall I do with Jesus who some of you say is the Messiah?" They all answered, "Command your soldiers to nail him to a cross!" 23 Pilate replied, "Why? What crime has he committed?" But they shouted even louder, "Have him crucified!"

24 Pilate realized that he was accomplishing nothing. He saw that instead, the people were starting to riot. So he took a basin of water and washed his hands as the crowd was watching. He said, "By washing my hands I am showing you that if this man dies, it is your fault, not mine!"

25 And all the people answered, "The guilt for causing him to die will be on us, and it will be on our children, too!" 26 Then he ordered the soldiers to release Barabbas for them. But he ordered that his soldiers whip Jesus. And then he turned Jesus over to the soldiers for them to nail Jesus to a cross.

This is an Innocent Man

A Texas man, Cornelius Dupree Jr., was imprisoned 30 years ago on aggravated robbery charges had his conviction overturned on January 2011 after DNA evidence exonerated him.

As a Canadian example, David Milgaard was charged with the 1969 murder of Saskatoon nursing aide Gail Miller and in January 1970 was sentenced to life in prison. In 1991, the Supreme Court of Canada was directed to review the conviction. The Supreme Court of Canada set the conviction aside in 1992, and Milgaard was subsequently cleared by DNA evidence five years later. He spent a total of 27 years behind bars.

Many of us have been accused of things that we have not done. For most of the times this happens it is due to a lack of information on the part of the accuser. A very few of us have been accused of wrongdoing where there was no evidence to prove you innocent. The portion of scripture we are looking at today tells us about the last trial of Jesus prior to His humiliation and crucifixion.

In order to do this passage justice, we need to backtrack just a little bit. When we put all the details together from all the other scriptures, we see Jesus went through 4 trials before this one. The first trial was before Annas the former High Priest of Israel immediately after being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The second trial happened before the son-in-law of Annas, Caiaphas who was High Priest at that time. This trial deemed Jesus worthy of death based on the charge of blasphemy.

His third trial was before Pilate (verse 2 of our text). This was a short trial. Pilate rapidly found out Jesus was a Galilean and this placed Him outside of Pilate's jurisdiction. It provided Pilate an opportunity to unload this farce of a Jewish trial on someone else.

Galilee was under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas at this time so he sent Jesus to Herod who conveniently was in town at the time. Jesus refused to speak to Herod during this fourth trial even after being questioned at length.

Jesus was then shuttled back to Pilate (verse 11 of our text) where we find ourselves immersed in the story. Please bear in mind all these events happened through the course of one single night.

When I was in high school, my English teacher made a point of teaching us to identify the important scenes and characters in every story we went through. It helped me learn Shakespeare, it will partially help us understand what was going on in this final chapter of Jesus prior to His crucifixion and death.

In looking at the various scenes and characters I want us to always have in the back of our minds, what Matthew had in mind in writing the narrative this way. I am going to be taking a 30,000 ft view over this narrative. There are many sermons that focus in on the individual aspects of each of the 5 stories we will look at but I would like to tie all of these together today. Remember Matthew was the tax collector formerly called Levi. We saw his story unfold in almost an offhand way in chapter 9. The main audience Matthew wrote to was to Jews. He wanted to prove to the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah. So as we go through this passage keep remembering, why was this important to Matthew? Why would this be important to the Jews? Using this line of questioning I hope to show why this is important to us.

Scene 1- The Sanhedrin Delivers Jesus to Pilate

Our characters are the Sanhedrin (the religious authority of the land and by extension also the civil authorities), Jesus and Pilate. In this passage, Pilate plays a minor role in that he attempts to shuttle Jesus off to someone else in order that they deal with what he knows is a fabricated sentence. You have to understand in the politics of that time, Pilate was not a popular ruler. The Jews hated anyone who ruled over them but they also knew enough to respect someone who commanded the amount of power Pilate had. The Sanhedrin knew enough about backroom dealings that they figured they could shoehorn Pilate into doing their dirty work.

Pilate was no dummy either. He knew he had to keep the peace otherwise Rome would be breathing down his neck. There was enough political problems for Pilate back in Rome because of an assassination plot conspired by a close friend of his to kill the Emperor. He did not need anyone looking too closely at him at this time. If he could make this Jesus issue look like someone else's fault, all the better for him.

So looking at the passage. All four gospel writers point out this event happened early in the morning (Mark 15:1, Luke 22:68 to 23:1, John 18:28). What is important about this event that required all four gospel writers to mention the fact that it was the crack of dawn? Back to my original question, what was important about this that Matthew wanted the Jews to know?

It turns out that the Sanhedrin broke at least 22 of their own rules in regards to trials. Of the 22 listed here is just a sample.

1. There was to be no arrest by religious authorities that was affected by a bribe. Ex 23:8
2. There were to be no steps of criminal proceedings after sunset.
3. There were to be no secret trials, only public ones.
4. Sanhedrin trials could only be conducted in the Hall of Judgement of the Temple Compound
5. A person could not be condemned on the basis of his words alone.

6. The sentence could only be pronounced three days after the guilty verdict

It would seem that after a roller coaster of emotions and passion throughout the night, someone in the Sanhedrin realized that if they were going to execute Jesus, they would have to at least put a veneer of authenticity on the proceedings. The easiest way would be to wait until morning and then get Jesus to Pilate as quickly as possible. What does this tell us? This was, to borrow an older term, a kangaroo court. The decision had been made and the entire point of the investigation was to get to the guilty verdict regardless of what story the evidence told. This captive man before Pilate was innocent.

Scene 2- The Remorse of Judas

The characters in this act are only Judas and the chief priests and elders. In this act, Judas who had been watching the events unfold, realizes what is going to happen to Jesus and comes to his senses. Depending on your translation of the Bible, you may have the phrase 'Judas repented' showing up in verse 3. He outright states that he betrayed innocent blood and wants to return the bribe money. The priests and elders (of the Sanhedrin) got exactly what they wanted and they don't care about the remorse of one man. They told him to take of the matter himself, they were done with him.

The inevitable question that arises as a result of the phrase 'Judas repented' is, was Judas saved? There are two Greek words which both are translated into English as repented. One is 'metanoia' which has the concept of salvation repentance. This is not the word used in this portion of the text. The word used in passage is 'metamelomai' which means to be filled with regret and remorse, or to have a conscience problem. It does not carry the meaning of salvation repentance. The answer to the question is then, no, Judas was not saved. He was the son of perdition and to perdition he went. So Judas threw the money into the Temple compound and then went out and hanged himself.

Matthew again lets us know this man Jesus is innocent.

Scene 3- The Second Trial before Pilate

In this scene we have Jesus, Pilate and the chief priests and elders but we seem to be missing some of the details. There is a little more information contained in Luke and Mark, but the lion's share of the details for this scene actually comes from John 18:28-40. Putting all the sources together, this is the second stage of the civil trial before Pilate. Pilate makes several specific attempts to get Jesus released during this period of time although Matthew does not deal with that portion of the trial.

During this passage of Matthew, the question Pilate asks Jesus is really the high point of this section. It is not Jesus' answer that amazes Pilate, it is that Jesus refuses to answer any further. So why would this event rate high enough in Matthew's mind to be entered into the passion week narrative that he wrote.

Matthew was a Jew writing to Jews in order to convince them that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. Throughout the book of Matthew there are scenes and quotes looking back to the Old Testament which foreshadow the coming Messiah and I think Matthew is doing exactly that in order to draw a response from his target audience. The two Old Testament passages that Matthew is drawing from are Psalm 38:13-14 and Isaiah 53:7

Psa 38:11-15 My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kin stand far off.

Those who seek my life lay their snares; those who seek my hurt speak of ruin and meditate treachery all day long. But I am like a deaf man; I do not hear, like a mute man who does not open his mouth.

I have become like a man who does not hear, and in whose mouth are no rebukes. But for you, O LORD, do I wait; it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer.

Isa 53:1-8 Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

Matthew is drawing his audience to the foreshadowing in these two passages that the Messiah would not offer any rebuke or rebuttal to the charges being brought against Him. From the passage in John we hear Pilate state that this man is innocent and now Matthew adds that this innocent man stands quietly waiting upon God to be his protector.

So now we have had three of the five stories proclaiming the innocence of Jesus. Just to get your brain working remember my original question. Why was this important enough for Matthew to write this down? Why would this be important to a Jew? Let's keep going.

Scene 4- Barabbas

The characters in this scene are Pilate, Pilate's wife, the Jewish crowd with the chief priests and elders within them, Barabbas and Jesus. Barabbas was a prisoner during Jesus' time, convicted of committing murder during a rebellion. Jesus and Barabbas were both prisoners of Pilate on the morning of Jesus' crucifixion, and were part of an intriguing and significant prisoner exchange. Matthew tells us of a custom that had developed between the Romans and the Jews by this time. During the Passover feast the Romans would release a Jewish prisoner as a goodwill gesture to the Jews.

So now we have two captive prisoners: Jesus and Barabbas. Jesus, who has officially been found innocent, and Barabbas, who has officially been found guilty. Specifically, Barabbas was guilty of rebellion (John 18:40), the exact same thing Jesus was accused of but found innocent (Luke 23:14). Through that rebellion, Barabbas had committed murder (Mark 15:7), and faced the death penalty.

Of all the names in the world, this luckiest of pardoned death row inmates happened to be named Barabbas. It is a rather weird name, and it is not a proper name. It is actually a title. The gospels do not give us this man's proper name. We do know from other sources that this man's name was also Jesus

showing that this was a common enough name in this time and place. See, people in Jesus' time often had names that identified them with their fathers and distinguished them from others with similar names. For example, James son of Zebedee versus James son of Alphaeus (Mark 3:17-18). In Israel, the word for "son of" was "bar", which is where Barabbas gets the first part of his name. "Abba" was the word for "father" or simply "daddy". So, Barabbas literally translates to "son of the father". This name is useless for the purpose that "son of" names were designed for, of distinguishing people from each other based on having different fathers; Barabbas' unspecified parents might as well have named their child "Anonymous". Barabbas could have been pretty much anyone; we are all children of fathers. You could even argue that we have all taken part in rebellion—against parents, or authority figures, and certainly against God.

And that is the beauty of this little prisoner exchange: Jesus, innocent, and the Son of the Father, takes the punishment that Barabbas, the anonymous everyman, rightfully deserved. Barabbas was guilty of rebellion that led to murder; Jesus was murdered as punishment for every man's rebellion.

The second act within this scene is that of Pilate's wife. On the good side, it would appear that she is spiritually sensitive and identified Jesus as a righteous and innocent man. At worst, she had been told about Jesus from the stories being circulated and was convicted. Either way, this passage in Matthew only gives us a glimpse of her involvement. The non-inspired Gospel of Nicodemus, identifies her as Claudia Procula, and a granddaughter of the Emperor Augustus. The book also claims she was a proselyte to Judaism, being among the women of higher classes over whom the Jewish religion exercised considerable influence. Some authors suggest she later converted to Christianity and is named in 2 Tim 4:21 (Claudia)- however this is speculation at best.

So again Matthew is telling us this is an innocent man.

Scene 5- Washing the Hands

In this our final scene we have everybody together except Judas Iscariot. At this point in time, Pilate has made several attempts to release Jesus however as Matthew writes, a riot was close to forming. Earlier in verse 19 we saw that Pilate was in the judgement seat which means a verdict had to be given. The verdict he gives is again that this man is innocent however because of the riot, the leaders goading people on and the troubles Pilate was having back home in Rome he tells the Jews to do with Jesus what they want. As far as Pilate is concerned he is innocent of this matter and he washes his hand in front of them as physical testimony of that.

Matthew again points us to the fact that Jesus is an innocent man.

Application

Now if I stopped the sermon at this point, that would be doing you a great dis-service. Just knowing that Jesus is an innocent man going to His execution is only a puzzle piece in the grand scheme of the scriptures. What needs to be done now is to look at the overall plan of God through the ages to see how this little piece fit into it. So let's start. I plan to use scriptures from the Old and New Testament in order to show how this plan is revealed.

Point 1: Mankind are all sinners and incapable of saving themselves.

In Genesis 3 the story of Adam, Eve, the serpent and God unfolds. By disobeying God and eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve sinned against God. The standard was perfection, anything less deserves, no, requires separation from the presence of God. And that is exactly what we see happen at the end of the chapter. God drives the two humans out of the Garden of Eden and places an angelic guard around the tree of Life. The New Testament tells us in Romans 3 that there is no distinction among mankind, everyone has sinned (vs 22-23). As a result of Adam and Eve's sin, we are also sinners because we not only inherited their DNA, we inherited their sinful nature. We are incapable of saving ourselves.

Point 2: Humanity needs a salvation.

So now we have an impossible problem to solve. This separation from God is not just for a season or decades, it is eternal. As long as that sinful nature is still in you, you have no hope. The prophet Ezekiel wrote in his book, the 18th chapter, a message from God that basically boils down to "The soul that sins must die for those sins." The offense is sin; the punishment is death. This death becomes separation from God for all eternity, there are no second chances.

Romans 6:23a concurs, "The wages of sin is death," and Ephesians 2:1 tells us that we are spiritually dead in those sins and trespasses. Dead men do not move. Dead men do not breathe. Dead men do not make decisions. They are dead.

What we need is a salvation. Something that can be applied to us that will counteract this state of sinful corruption and death.

Point 3: The saving agent must be pure, unblemished

God, in His mercy, knew that this was going to be the case and started a program right from the beginning. He told the serpent (satan) back in Genesis 3 that one of Eve's descendants would crush his head. This is the very first report of the good news that there would be a saviour for mankind. The next passage describes how God made garments from the skins of animals to cover these first humans. Think about that. These animals were innocent, God killed them and used their skins as a covering for Adam and Eve. This points us to the need for having our sins covered by something outside of ourselves.

This concept gets expanded much more greatly in the concept of the Passover lamb. On the very first Passover, the Hebrews were slaves to the pharaoh. God commanded through Moses that pharaoh was supposed to let the Hebrews go in order that they could worship Him outside of Egypt. Pharaoh refused and God demonstrated His power through 10 different plagues. The last plague is the one that interests us today. Exodus 12 tells us that in order for the Hebrews to avoid this last plague, they were to take a lamb from the flock. Now this lamb had to be a one year old male without blemish, meaning it was pure and innocent. This animal would be butchered at the doorway of their houses and its blood would be used to mark the doorposts and the lintel. When God passed through Egypt that night only the houses with the blood on the doorframes were spared the death of the first-born. This lamb was the innocent sacrifice that would spare those within the house from God's wrath. Just a little later in the desert God would explain the need for this blood.

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. (Lev 17:11)

Going back to Rom 3, we need to read a little further from where we left off.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. (Rom 3:23-25)

Do you see that? Jesus was put forward by God as the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice, just like that lamb which would justify us before God from our sins. The blood on the doorposts, lintel and pooled at the threshold foreshadowed the wounds of Jesus on the cross.

Another verse.

2Co 5:21 For our sake he (God) made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God.

Point 4: So what is our response?

Alright then, Jesus will die as an innocent man. He was morally and spiritually perfect. He was the perfect sacrifice God used to not only cover but to remove our sins. Well then the next obvious question should be does this mean that everybody gets to go to heaven then? If you read authors such as Rob Bell "Love Wins" or William Paul Young "The Shack" and his most recent book "Lies We Believe about God", they would tell you that salvation is universal. Everybody gets a free pass into heaven. The Bible tells a different story however.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (Joh 1:12-13)

but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (Joh 20:31)

And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." (Act 16:29-31)

So what does it mean to 'believe in Jesus'?

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." (Rom 10:9-11)

Going back to my examples, Jesus was innocent like Cornelius Dupree or David Milgaard. If we want to see our place in this story, there is a different character that is our stand-in. In this story Barabbas represents all of us. He deserved the full punishment of the law and was set free. This is the state we all are in before God. We all deserve the full punishment of our sins before a Holy God and on our own that is exactly what we will get. God, the Holy Judge, will one day look upon each of us and depending on what He sees will assign us a place either with Him or away from Him. That decision depends on who you are relying upon for your right standing before God.

So if you are an unbeliever, if you have not professed belief in Jesus the Messiah as the One who can take away your sin, the prognosis is not good. Your standing before God will be based purely upon you. I have already gone through your natural state before God. You are already dead in your sins and trespasses, you have no hope. The only thing awaiting in your future is an eternity spent away from God as the scriptures describe in eternal conscious torment. Now if you are listening to me and are getting uncomfortable with this message I am speaking, you need to come up to the front after the service and I or an elder will talk with you about your sin and your saviour. There is forgiveness available for you at the cross too. You do not have to get better in order to ask for it. Please do not shrug this off, this message has eternal consequences. The time for your salvation is right now.

Brothers and sisters, those of you who have professed belief in Jesus as the Messiah, I have good news for you. Your sins are covered and removed. You have a right standing before God and can look forward to meeting Him face to face without fear or shrinking away. WHY? Because when God the Father looks at you, the only thing He will see is the covering of Jesus on you. He will not see your sins and failure anymore. That is gone and paid for and you are now freed from the penalty sin. This innocent man has provided the best news you could possibly hear. You have been forgiven.

Let's pray.