

We are returning this morning to our Lent sermon series called Gethsemane. Lent, again, is the season where we as a church focus ourselves on the suffering of Christ and on His journey to the cross, so that when Easter comes, the truth and the glory of the resurrection can be more tangible for us. We can enjoy it, embrace it, and taste it just a bit more.

Because unless we've truly sat with what Jesus has done, what all His suffering has accomplished, resurrection remains a theological concept that doesn't actually sink in to our souls.

As Paul said in Philippians 3, *"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,"<sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."*

I want to know Christ. That's what we're doing in this season of Lent. Seeking to know Christ and to participate—as best as we can—in His sufferings, in order to know the power of His resurrection.

In the last few weeks, we've seen how from the moment that Jesus steps foot into the Garden of Gethsemane, the mood changes. The tone shifts. Jesus' disposition change as He begins to focus His attention on what is coming.

He has submitted Himself to drinking the cup of God's judgement—because only He can. He's been rejected, abandoned, and denied (as we saw last week) by all of His disciples—because He had to face this alone. He's been accused of blasphemy and cursed by the very people who were meant to worship Him—because they deem him to be, not worthy of glory, but of death.

And now they take Him to the only person who can orchestrate it. **Read Matthew 27:11-26.**

There was an interview done, back in 1999, with Fred Rogers. If you're not familiar with Mr. Rogers, he was a children's television broadcaster, known for his cardigan sweater, loafers, quant little home, and puppets—but even more so for his genuine love for children.

And in the interview, he was asked whether he was offended by all the various parodies of him that were being performed on late night shows and elsewhere—comedians poking fun at his character.

"Only once," he said. There was a local network that had an afternoon comedy sketch hour, and a comedian dressed as Mr. Rogers, mimicking his voice and everything, jokingly invited 'children' to take their mommy's hairspray and daddy's cigarette lighter and make a blowtorch.

Now, the parody was of course done for adults, and to get a laugh, but Mr. Rogers actually wrote a cease-and-desist letter to the network, which is a fairly serious thing. And he did that, not just because this comedian was potentially teaching children to become arsonists, but because he was doing so *as* Mr. Rogers.

In other words, young children—who knew the real Mr. Rogers—could have been deceived as to who Mr. Rogers was because this comedian was leveraging the trust and reputation that Fred Rogers had built up over a lifetime and using it to his own advantage—to get what he wanted, to get a laugh, to further his own career.

Now, clearly this comedian didn't actually know Mr. Rogers and what he was about. Because if he *really* knew Fred Rogers, would he have done that? It's easy to publicly misrepresent someone or malign their reputation when you don't actually know them.

We see something similar happening in this passage in Matthew, as the priests and elders in Jerusalem distort the image of Jesus and publicly malign Him in order to bolster their own self-image in the eyes of Rome.

They bring Jesus before a Roman governor with a political charge because they want Jesus to die by a Roman execution. That's their plan. They take the person of Jesus and masquerade Him as a threat to the Roman empire.

But in this case, there's no cease-and-desist letter written. By the time we're invited into this scene, the Temple leaders have already summarized for Pilate why they've brought this fraud before him.

He's claimed to be the King of the Jews, which is no small thing. Because Herod, if anyone, was the king of the Jews—at least in terms of political standing. And Pilate himself was ultimately the one who had political authority over the Jews.

So for Pilate, this kind of thing screams of insurrection or revolutionary movement—which he needed to avoid at all costs to keep the 'pax romana,' the peace of Rome. Jesus was the kind of person that Pilate was supposed to stamp out, because his own reputation would have been at stake.

So as Jesus is standing before him, and naturally the first question that Pilate needs to ask Jesus is are you who these temple leaders are saying you are? "*Are you the King of the Jews?*" he asks.

And how does Jesus respond? "*You have said so.*" Why does this sound familiar?

Look back at chapter 26 with me. Earlier, before the garden, when Jesus is sharing in the Passover meal with his disciples—the Last Supper—as it's been called—Jesus shares with his disciples that one of them is going to betray him. An early sign, already, that He will be rejected.

And all the disciples of course—with distressed looks on their faces—look at Jesus and ask, "*Surely you don't mean me, Lord?*" Surely you don't mean *me*?

Finally Judas—who's likely just following along with what everyone else is doing—says to Jesus, “*Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?*”

And Jesus quietly says to him, “*You have said so.*”

Then later in Matthew 26—we looked at this a couple weeks ago—Jesus is standing before the Sanhedrin, the elders and priests, including the high priest Caiaphas. And after a long series of debates and false witnesses, finally Caiaphas gets fed up and just straight up asks Jesus, “*I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.*”

And how does Jesus respond? “*You have said so.*”

And now here in chapter 27, Jesus is standing before Pilate. And when Pilate asks him to clarify if He is in fact who the leaders accuse him of falsely pretending to be, “the King of the Jews,” how does Jesus respond?

“*You have said so.*”

Three times Jesus' image or identity is questioned, and three times Jesus turns the question back to them to say, literally, ‘You say,’ or ‘You've said it.’ Almost as if to say to them, “You are saying this, but you don't understand it. You don't actually know what you're saying about me.”

Which is really important for us to note; because it's not like it's just the priests who have rejected Jesus. A disciple—one of His own. A *high priest*—a leader of God's people. And even a Gentile all reject Jesus *because they don't understand who He is.*

In other words, no one is more ‘at fault’ than anyone else in this story. That's what Matthew's trying to communicate here. No one ‘knows’ Jesus better than anyone else. Between the angry mob, the nonexistent disciples who have deserted Him, the elders and priests, and the roman authorities, *everyone* in this story has contributed to the outcome.

Which is perhaps why Jesus, again, goes silent before His accusers. From the very beginning, the people who were supposed to *know* God have rejected Him as their King. The chief priests and elders are yelling and shouting that Jesus *isn't* their king. He's a fake, a fraud, a traitor, a deceiver.

Yet He doesn't respond. Not once. To which Pilate is shocked—because every single individual who has stood on trial before him in the past would have vehemently defended themselves in order to save themselves from punishment and death.

That's just what you do. When you are being accused—whether it's true or not—the inclination is always to defend yourself. And for Jesus, this was His last opportunity to *save* Himself.

Jesus could have defended Himself. “They’re taking my identity and reputation and distorting it. They’re using my words and twisting them.” But He says nothing. Because they wouldn’t have received it anyway. They didn’t know Him.

Again, that passage from Isaiah 53 comes to mind:

*“He was oppressed and afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.”*

The men who were called by God to offer routine sacrifices—and on Passover the sacrifice was a lamb, so thousands of lambs were bleating and being sacrificed all over Israel. But these men are the ones who are putting the very God they were meant to worship, like a lamb, on the offering table.

But Jesus is the silent lamb who does not open His mouth. And He won’t actually open His mouth again until He is in fact nailed to the offering table.

There’s a painting by a 19<sup>th</sup> century French artist named James Tissot, and the image is of Jesus standing before Pilate in this inquisition of sorts.

And there are many paintings—throughout church history—that depict this scene, including some very famous ones. But I was struck by this one, particularly because of the way that Jesus is portrayed. Many of the other images have Jesus dressed in white, with a crown of thorns on His head, maybe a halo like the old Byzantine paintings always have.

And most notably, they all have Jesus’ hands tied in such a way that his wrists cross over. But in this picture, look at how Jesus’ hands are tied.

Side by side. Like a lamb. As if this moment here with Pilate won’t change the fact that Jesus has already been prepared for sacrifice.

Yet as readers, there is an interesting twist in the story. There’s a moment where—if you’ve never read this story before—you might actually wonder if Jesus has a second chance. Maybe this is the opportunity to salvage his reputation and reassert who He is. Get people to believe in Him again.

Because it just so happens that every Passover, as a way to keep himself in good favour with the Jews, Pilate releases a prisoner back to the Jewish people. And this particular year, there happens to be a prisoner whose name was also Jesus.

Jesus Barabbas, a rebel who led a violent insurrection, an uprising against the Roman government. He was apparently quite popular—kind of like a Jewish Robin Hood.

We often call him ‘Barabbas,’ but that was more-or-less what we would think of as his last name, an identifier of the family that he was from. Because ‘bar’ meant from or of, and Abbas (which sounds like the word for father, Abba) would have been the name of his father.

So Jesus ‘Barabbas’ literally meant Jesus ‘from Abbas’—*or* Jesus ‘of the father.’

Now, is this intentional on Matthew’s part to highlight this detail? 100%. *Because which ‘son of the father’ will the people choose?* Which ‘Jesus’ do you really want? How do you understand him? Is he a Jesus of strong political and violent action? Or a Jesus of meekness and humility?

Who’s the *real* Jesus? Who’s the *true* Saviour?

Which one would you choose? Because if we think about it, what we’re actually choosing between here—what the crowds on that early Friday morning were choosing between—was Jesus Himself, and an *image* of Jesus built around their own wants and desires—what a Messiah would look like in their own image.

In other words, what we need to understand is that the man standing next to the real Jesus stands there on that platform as representative of each one of us.

Do this with me. Put yourself in Barabbas’ shoes right now. Picture yourself standing beside Jesus. This is your opportunity to be released. To get your life back. To have the chains taken off. This guy says He’s a king? You’ve accomplished more than Him. You can do more than He’s done.

I mean, you know that you deserve crucifixion in the eyes of Rome—you’ve put that on yourself. But if there’s an opportunity to get out of it, why not?

So as soon as you get the chance, you try to rally the crowd to pick you. You’re looking eagerly at them with desperation in your eyes: pick me, pick me, pick me. I’m the one you want.

Pilate steps forward and asks the crowd, “*Which of the two do you want me to release to you?*” And as it turns out your job is pretty easy, because the whole crowd shouts out ‘Barabbas! Jesus Barabbas!’

They’ve chosen you. They actually chose you. They want you.

And all the while, the ‘other Jesus’ standing next to you is literally saying nothing. In fact, He doesn’t even appear to want to be released. As if He has no interest in changing their minds.

As if He's already chosen His own fate. As if He's choosing to let *you* go. Why would He do that?

Pilate pleads with the crowd—after having gotten a word of caution from his wife—“*Why? What crime has he committed?*” But they shout all the louder, “*Crucify him!*” And an uproar begins.

What does that feel like to have the mobs of people shouting your name, knowing that you're culpable, while the innocent one stands next to you condemned for having done nothing? And He's not fighting it?

I want you to see the face of 'the other Jesus' standing next to you. What is He saying, without saying anything?

Pilate has had enough of it, and he orders for the chains to be taken off your wrists. But on the 'other Jesus' the chains remain. And as you are set free to the crowds, receiving hugs and high fives, the guards take the 'other Jesus' away to be flogged and crucified.

What is it like to watch Him being crucified on a hill outside the city walls of Jerusalem? To see the man who—by letting Himself stand accused—enabled you to be set free. He who was currently suffering the humiliating punishment that had actually been on the table for you?

Why was He silent? Why didn't He say anything? Why didn't He defend Himself or put up a fight? He didn't even know you. And you didn't know Him.

But He chose to die instead of you.

This is exactly what was *so hard* for the disciples to grasp. Why would Jesus do this? Why would He *willingly* suffer? Why would He put Himself through this when He had told them that in a moment's notice, He could summon angels to help Him? When they had *seen* with their own eyes that He could walk on water, calm storms, send out demons, heal bodies.

Was it all just a façade? Were we deceived? Was it not actually real?

I wonder, often, if our own faith is tested most when we feel like we've misunderstood or been fed a false narrative about who Jesus is. When we anticipate things to look a certain way, a King who won't disappoint us. When we are duped into thinking that Jesus needs to look like us and care about the things that we care about.

When we're too focused on what *we* want Him to look like. Or perhaps when—at the end of the day—we'd rather gain the favor and applause of others than stand next to the suffering Jesus.

I mean, really, who believes in a suffering King? Give me someone real to follow who will actually impress me. You know how many parodies have been made about this 'other Jesus?' There's no way that He's the real deal. You know how often He's been publicly made fun of and critiqued? No king in history has ever succeeded in life by 'ruling' the way that He did.

And yet, here we are.

What do you think? Who is the real Jesus? Is He the Saviour you want, or the Saviour you need? If you were standing before His crucified body, would you be inclined to scoff or to worship?

Is He, in fact, the Way, the Truth, and the Life who has conquered the grave and paved the way for *all of us* to be called 'sons of the father'?

If Pilate were to ask you, "Is this man the King of the Jews," what would you say?

Is He your King, in life and in death?