

The Son of God on Trial

Matthew 27

Kingdom Come! (Gospel of Matthew Series)

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Sunday, April 2, 2017, 10:30am at Living Hope Church of Roselle, Illinois

livinghopechurch.net

“Depend on it, my hearer, you never will go to heaven unless you are prepared to worship Jesus Christ as God.”

~ **Charles Haddon Spurgeon**

Proposition: Jesus is the God-man revealed as the Messiah in his role as Servant, King, and Substitute.

Open your Bible to **Matthew 27** and Isaiah 53 if you would. We are in a series in the book of Matthew entitled “Kingdom Come.” This morning we are looking at a message entitled: “The Son of God on Trial.” We have three more messages to go after today in the book of Matthew.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. **Welcome to our Visitors!**
2. **Midweek Services:** Join us for Bible Study and Prayer
3. **New Members’ Class** begins Sunday April 23 during Sunday School at 9:30am.

Introduction

The Divine Defendant on Trial

As we come to Matthew 27, we have the most **significant court case in the history of the world**. We read in **Mt 27:1-2**, “When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. 2 And they **bound him** and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.”

It was an illegal trial, held in the middle of the night, with an unjust verdict. “Blasphemy” was the charge. Had Christ only been a man, the charge would have been just. This is the God-Man. This is the Almighty God, Second Person of the Trinity, yet he is unrecognizable.

Can You Recognize the Son of God?

Can you recognize the glorious Son of God here? I can’t. He doesn’t look glorious. There are four “Servant” songs in Isaiah that perplexed the Jewish readers.¹ They describe Messiah as being the Servant of YHWH. He’s a divine king, yet a servant who lays down his life for his people. (Mt 1:21).

¹ The Servant Songs are found in Isaiah 42:1–9; Isaiah 49:1–13; Isaiah 50:4–11; and Isaiah 52:13–53:12.

They describe the Messiah not only as a glorious King, but as the King who becomes a Suffering Servant. The first two songs show how is **God's glorious servant**. He perfectly expresses who God is through his compassionate healing ministry. He has divine qualities He gives sight to the blind. He makes the lame walk. He is a light to the nations.

But the next two songs describe him as **God's suffering servant** with divine power who "gives his back to the smiters" (**Isa 50:4-11**). And again, in Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53:2-5 – Messiah is the servant who suffers in the place of his people.

“He had no form or majesty that we should look at him,

and no beauty that we should desire him.

3 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.

4 Surely he has borne our griefs

and carried our sorrows;

yet we esteemed him stricken,

smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 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.”

A Look at the Defendant

The Son of God is on trial. He is the divine Defendant. He created the worlds. He lends breath to everyone on earth. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made" (Jn 1:1-3).

Let's look at the divine Defendant. He is the Second Person of the Triune God. He is the very expression, message, Word of God. He exposit the Father. He makes him known. He reveals God to every man. He draws men to the Father.

John pronounces some of the saddest words in the New Testament. "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (**Jn 1:11**). They didn't recognize him. They weren't looking for a "man of sorrows." He had "no form or majesty." He didn't look kingly.

We Don't Recognize Him

There was never a more glorious, upright person ever to walk the earth. There was never one so exceedingly good, generous and kind. Why was *he* on trial? What did he do? He claimed to be the apocalyptic Judge of all the world. He is Lord, and the reason we don't recognize him is because he doesn't look like a king. "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" (Isa 53:3).

We know that he is Lord of all. He creates and controls the laws of science. It is his image in every man that gives each of us our conscience. His laws of morality are written upon every human heart. Yet he is now on trial because we don't recognize him. I say "we." You and I are at this Kangaroo court.

Proposition: Jesus is the God-man revealed as the Messiah in his role as Servant, King, and Substitute.

Outline

- The One on trial is the divine **Servant**, Mt 27:1-10.
- The One on trial is the divine **King**, Mt 27:11-14.
- The One on trial is the divine **Substitute**, Mt 27:15-26.

I. The One on trial is the divine Servant, Mt 27:1-10.

The question is, how can someone so divine be a servant? The point of Matthew in the first ten verses of Matthew 27 is to identify Jesus as the Suffering servant who does not open his mouth.

A. THE PRIESTS (Mt 27:1)

Mt 27:1, “When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.”

The priests have put the Son of God on trial. They have done so illegally, having a trial in three stages at night. Verse 2 says they “bind” the Son of God. They have already confined him for the night in a dungeon in the high priest’s home.

They “take counsel” against Jesus “to put him to death.” They are fulfilling Psalm 2, conspiring with the Gentiles against the LORD and against his Anointed, Jesus the Messiah.

The Dungeon is not Holding the Son of God There

Charged with **blasphemy** and beaten bloody by the council of the Sanhedrin, Jesus is left to sleep – likely in a dungeon at Caiaphas’s house. “At the site in Jerusalem traditionally believed to be the location of Caiaphas’s house, there is a small, ancient stone dungeon with an opening just large enough for one person to be lowered into the dungeon.”² After our Lord’s trial ended, Christ was likely confined in such a prison for the remainder of the night. Jesus, on the other hand is likely fulfilling **Psalm 88:6-9**,

“You have put me in the depths of the pit,
in the regions dark and deep.
7 Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
and you overwhelm me with all your waves. Selah
8 You have caused my companions to shun me;
you have made me a horror to them.
I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
9 my eye grows dim through sorrow.”

LOVE HOLDS HIM THERE

The night before his crucifixion, he is confined to this tiny space for you. He loves you. These priests do not recognize that this is the Messiah. They have not read their Scriptures well. No dungeon or rope binding his feet can confine him.

² MacArthur, John F. (2004-03-30). *The Murder of Jesus* (Kindle Locations 2032-2035). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

The dungeon is not holding him there. The rope is not confining him. It is his love for you that keeps him there. It is his everlasting mercy that confines him to that dungeon cell.

OBEDIENCE HOLDS HIM THERE

Not only his love, but his obedience to the Father. Biblical scholars and theologians (Lane, Carson, MacArthur) have noted another thing that holds Jesus there confined in a dungeon. He is fulfilling prophecy. He is the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. There are four Servant Songs in Isaiah.

Jesus is the divine slave, the divine servant from Isaiah's Servant Songs. He is both glorious, bringing light to the Gentiles, and yet he is one who suffers.

He is committed to be the Servant of the Lord. "Servant of the Lord" is the favorite Messianic title of Isaiah. The emphasis of that title of Slave or Servant is that he is committed to carrying out his Father's will.

Look at this humble submission of Christ. He's willing to humble himself to do the will of the Father. He loves you. He's on trial for treason, but it is the priest and Pilate that are the treasonous ones.

Isaiah 53:5, "...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."

The priests didn't hold him there, it was his **obedience** to the Father and his **love for you!**

B. THE PLOT (Mt 27:1b-2)

Mt 27:1-2, "When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the **people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. 2 And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.**"

Fulfilling Prophecy

The priests have a great **plot** they think will work. They will conspire with the Romans so that the blood of this miracle worker is not on their hands.

Little do they know their plot is actually fulfilling the prophecy of Jesus and of the Old Testament (**Psa 2**). The Jewish Messiah will "give his back to the [Roman] smiters" (**Isa 50:4-11**).

Matthew 27 begins with the Jewish rulers handing over Jesus to the Gentiles in the person of Pilate, the Roman governor. This was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy as well as of Jesus' own predictions of his death. He had warned the disciples, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will **turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life**" (**Mt 20:18-19**). Before Matthew recounts those events, however, he pauses to record the fate of Judas, the betrayer. Matthew is the only one of the four Gospel writers to do this.³

³ Boice, J. M. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (pp. 596-598). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

Changing the Charges

Morning comes. The Sanhedrin agreed on a verdict of death for blasphemy, but they change the charges before going to the Romans. They lie about the charges to get the Roman courts to listen. Instead of **blasphemy** charges, the conveniently change the charge to **sedition** (government overthrow) and treason. Since Jesus claims to be Messiah and King, then the Jewish authorities were hoping this change of emphasis would make our Lord look as if he were threatening Caesar.⁴ Jesus hears their lies, but still submits to not only the Jewish trial, but now the Roman trial.

The Plaintiffs: Priests (Sanhedrin) and Pilate

Who are these priests that have put the Lord of glory on trial? We read in “When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. 2 And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor” (Mt 27:1-2).

The 70 chief priests and 1 high priest who ruled Jerusalem were called the Sanhedrin. They take Jesus to the governor of Judea, named Pilate. They want the Romans to take the blame for the death of Jesus. If the Sanhedrin intended to ask Rome to execute the death penalty against Jesus, they would have to present the case against him in a compelling way. A religious charge like blasphemy meant nothing to the Romans. They needed something more specific.

Changing and Trumping Up the Charges

In order to satisfy Pilate’s demand for a specific charge and to secure Jesus’ conviction under Roman law, the chief priests and other leaders **fabricated** the allegation of **sedition** – inciting a rebellion or revolution against Caesar. That charge, of course, had nothing to do with the supposed blasphemy for which they had just sentenced Jesus to death.

The Sanhedrin’s Lies

Luke tells us of the Sanhedrin’s lies. **Lk 23:2a**, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar.” They lied. Jesus actually commanded his disciples and the Jewish authorities to pay taxes to Caesar, and to give to God what belongs to him. “and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King” (Lk 23:2).⁵ He is a king. Pilate asks him about that. Pilate knows he’s not a **seditions** king, but a **spiritual** one.

Pilate was not interested really in the guilt or innocence of Jesus, but in keeping the peace so that the people did not riot.

Consider Jesus as a humble servant accepting his place in our redemption. He must die if we are to live. He as Almighty God allows himself to be brought like a lamb to death. Can't you see Jesus in Pilate's judgment hall. This man knows nothing of justice, but is a cruel tyrant and an arrogant man. Yet he is like a sheep being shorn. He chose not to open his mouth. He accepts his Father's plan.

C. THE PRICE (Mt 27:3)

The Price of Christ, Fulfilled by Scripture

Mt. 27:3, “Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders”

⁴ Carson, D. A. *Matthew: The Expositor's Bible Commentary-Kindle Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), Kindle Locations 19196-19198.

⁵ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew* (Mt 27:11). Chicago: Moody Press.

Thirty (30) pieces of silver is what you would pay to buy out a slave (Exo 21:32).⁶ In Zechariah 11:12-13, Israel's appraisal of their Shepherd King's worth was **30 pieces of silver**.⁷ Matthew shows a correlation with the 30 pieces of silver, identifying Jesus as the Suffering Servant of Zechariah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.

The passage is about a King who becomes the Shepherd of a flock that is going to be slaughtered. The Shepherd is valued at 30 pieces of silver. Later in Zech 12, he instead lays down his life for the flock and is "pierced." Lying behind this passage, therefore, is the image of Jesus as the suffering Messiah.⁸ This is Matthew's way of identifying Jesus as the Suffering Servant who lays down his life as the Servant of YHWH.

A Slave Price

We have a few verses in here explaining how even Judas Iscariot's suicide was a prophecy fulfilled from Scripture. Two sets of Scriptures are woven together from Zechariah and Jeremiah, but Jeremiah is quoted since his book is at the beginning of the prophets. So they would often use synecdoche (naming a part for the whole) in speaking of the prophets. Jeremiah is also the more well-known of the prophets.

But, let's give Jesus Christ the glory here and not focus on Judas, but on Jesus. If you go back and read **Zechariah 11:12ff**, you find the emphasis is on the price of YHWH. What's YHWH worth? According to Zechariah, YHWH is worth only 30 pieces of silver to the nation of Israel. Their God is worth the price of a slave.

Judas's suicide is also an indictment of the priests. They should have been pointing Judas to the mercy of God, but instead they ask, "What is that to us?" "This is your responsibility."

So let me ask you this morning, as you go along this week, what is Jesus (YHWH) worth to you? Judas represents the Jewish nation here, and it is significant that the price for their Messiah is only 30 pieces of silver, a slave price.

D. JUDAS REPRESENTS ISRAEL'S REJECTION (Mt 27:3-10)

Mt 27:4-10, Judas comes to the Sanhedrin and elders "saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." 5 And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. 6 But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." 7 So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. 8 Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, 10 and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

Judas Comes with Remorse, Not Repentance

Judas comes to the priests **not with repentance**, but at least with great remorse.

Judas saw Jesus heal the sick, cure the leper, give sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. He heard the greatest Master ever to teach, God himself in human flesh. Day after day, Judas had

⁶ Day, A. C. (2009). *Collins Thesaurus of the Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

⁷ Lindsey, F. D. (1985). Zechariah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 1565). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁸ France, R. T. (1985). *Matthew: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 392). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

his chance to repent, but he resisted the Word of God for money. Over and over again he resisted. There is a point where God says, “Enough.” Still had Judas repented to God and to Christ, he could have been forgiven. As long as there is breath, there is hope.

“Judas’s end is a warning to us that it is possible to spend much time in Jesus’ company, hearing the best of sermons, and even witnessing an abundance of miracles, and still perish.”⁹

The Details of Judas’ Suicide

Instead of demonstrating godly repentance, Judas had the ultimate selfish pity party and hung himself.

The book of Acts gives more detail to the suicide of Judas. It is likely that the chief priests took the money from Judas and purchases a burial field for foreigners who died in Israel. Judas choses that very place to hang himself. He likely hung himself on a tree overlooking the Kidron brook in the Valley of Hinnom. St. Luke in the book of Acts says Judas’ bowels burst open, likely signifying that Judas hung himself on a weak branch, and his body fell to the craggy rocks by the Brook Kidron.

Cold Hearted Priests

Judas comes to the chief priests and returns the 30 pieces of silver that was in his pocket. They will not help him. They are not good priests. A godly priest would show a sinner mercy and grace. They throw it right back in his face: “What’s that to us. That’s your responsibility” (Mt 27:4).

The priests were to be compassionate people – those who can sympathize with hurting people. What they do is tragic. They do not plead with him, but turn him away. They do not try to work through his conscience, but leave him to his own dark thoughts. Judas was guilty, and though he was remorseful, his repentance was self-centered, not God-centered. Nonetheless, the focus here is on the priests.

The chief priests purchased a field with the money and made a cemetery for the poor called, “The Field of Blood” since it was bought with money that sold the innocent blood of the Son of God. Then they buried Judas in that field.

This is the low place that the priest have come to. Unclean money and buy an unclean field for unclean people. They don’t want to get messy. They stay out of the mess.

Background on the Potter

Judas is fulfilling prophecies about the Potter in **Jeremiah 19** and **Zechariah 11**. A “potter” would do one or two things.

- A potter was a metal smith who coined the silver and gold for the Temple
- A potter also would make pottery for the Temple for the priests to serve the sacrifices and bread offerings.

The “potter’s field” would have been the field right outside the Temple by the Brook Kidron where the Temple Potter would get clay to make the various vessels to serve in the Temple.

Prophecy about the Potter

As I said, Judas is fulfilling prophecies about the Potter in **Jeremiah 19** and **Zechariah 11**. They are both prophecies about Israel rejecting Messiah. So in a very real way, Judas is representative of **Israel rejecting her Messiah**.

⁹ Boice. *Matthew*, 598.

In the prophecy of **Jeremiah 19**, Jeremiah is told to go and break a pottery vessel. Because Israel has forsaken God's Shepherd, Israel will have no Shepherd to help and save them.

In **Zechariah 11:12-13**, YHWH tells Zechariah to go and save a flock of sheep (Judah) that is going to be led to the slaughter (by the Babylonians). Zechariah goes and acts as the Servant of the Lord, the Shepherd of Israel, but the sheep reject him. The Shepherd/Servant of YHWH asks how much his love and shepherding is worth, and the Servant of YHWH says, "And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. Then the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter" (Zech 11:12-13).

Why Jeremiah and Not Zechariah?

Why does Matthew quote Jeremiah when the majority of this prophecy is from Zechariah? If an ancient author weaves together two quotes from two prophets, it was acceptable to name only the more famous of the two.¹⁰ This was a typical way of quoting prophecies.¹¹

THE MAIN POINT OF JUDAS' APOSTASY

Judas Represents a Falling Away for Israel

The main point of Judas' apostasy is that Judas represents Israel final rejection of their Messiah. That is, he was in Jesus presence so often. He had so many opportunities, just like Israel. How sad to see Judas representing all Israel in rejecting the Messiah. "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (**Jn 1:11**). Judas represents Israel final rejection of their Messiah.

Yet his **execution** becomes our **salvation!** Judas' **betrayal** becomes our redemption. By Jesus's wounds we are healed.

Judas didn't ultimately put Jesus to death. It was God's plan. God used even this heinous act to do good to us.

God works all things together for good! Jesus is divine, but he's a Messianic Suffering Servant of YHWH. Hallelujah.

Transition: Jesus is not only the Messianic Servant foretold in the prophets, Jesus is the divine Messianic King. Jesus is on trial, and he is accused of many terrible things, like taking over the Roman government.

II. The One on trial is the divine King, Mt 27:11-14.

Not only did his own people reject him, but so did the Romans. Both Jew and Gentile nailed Jesus to that cross. He is asked a pointed question by Pilate in this passage.

Early in the morning the Sanhedrin come to Pilate. He's likely not happy since it is so early in the morning, but he is anxious to have all the festivities of Passover go smoothly. And so Pilate asks Jesus a question, "Are you the King of the Jews" (Mt 27:11).

¹⁰ To support this "mixed citation" theory, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave; A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1994), p. 651.

¹¹ O'Donnell. *Matthew*, 832.

A. THE QUESTION (Mt 27:11)

Mt 27:11, “Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You have said so.”

Though Jesus is in no way defensive of the charges, he reveals his true mission to Pilate. He is a king, but not from this realm. He is not a **sedition** king, but the **spiritual** “king of truth.”

The Prophecies for Jesus as Messianic King

Jesus is not only a king, He is the King of kings. The prophets of the Old Testament portray Messiah as the **Eternal Ruling King**.

- **The Peaceful King Riding on a Donkey’s Colt.** The first mention of Messiah as King is **Genesis 49:10-11**, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet...and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” Then we find out what kind of King he is in Genesis 49, He rides on a “**donkey's colt**.” He is a King that rides on a donkey’s colt, in order to bring a peace treaty. One day he will come again on a white war horse, declaring victory over his enemies. But this time he comes as a king that is humble, riding on a donkey’s colt.
- **The Omnipotent King Who is Mighty God.** You know these Scriptures right: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, **Mighty God**, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end” (Isa 9:6a). That’s king language! Not just any king, but the divine king: His title is: “Mighty God.”
- **The Everlasting King.** Of course, the most famous of these is in **Daniel 7:13-14** where the Messiah is given an Everlasting Kingdom. “behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; **his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.**”
- **The King of all kings.** **Daniel 2:44**, “The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.”

Yet Jesus stands trial, they are wondering who he is. He is accused of taking over the Roman government. Pilate sees through this. Jesus doesn’t answer a word while the chief priests are there. He lets his miracle and the lives of changed people speak for him.

B. THE ACCUSATIONS (Mt 27:12-14)

The Chief Priests Need Pilate to Blame

Mt 27:12-14, “But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. 13 Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” 14 But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.”The chief priests need Pilate. They don’t want to be liable for Jesus’ death. Some of the people are on

their side. They are playing on the people's fears and even their ambitions to be liked and accepted in the synagogue.

The priests who should be proclaiming Jesus as God and king are calling him a liar and a power hungry revolutionary. Pilate of course sees through this, but he's got pressure on him because of his own recent mishaps with the Jewish people.

The Nature of Christ's Kingdom

As the chief priests and elders leave, John records a private conversation between Pilate and Jesus. Jesus' first response to Pilate was a counter question: "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" (**Jn 18:34**). Surprised and taken aback, the governor retorted, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You up to me; what have You done?" (**Jn 18:35**). To which Jesus replied, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" (**Jn 18:36**).

Jesus is not only a king. But his kingdom is "not of this realm." His kingdom is not merely borders on the earth. He rules not only the earth, but the entire universe.

Colossians 1:16-17, "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

It was perhaps at this point that Jesus said, "**It is as you say.**" Commenting further about the true nature of His kingship, He said, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (**Jn 18:37**). Although he admitted to having no comprehension of what Jesus meant by "truth," Pilate "went out again to the Jews, and said to them, 'I find no guilt in Him.'" (v. 38).¹²

So there is Pilate on a great stage outside his judgment hall and releases his findings that our Lord is innocent.

PILATE WAS THE PERFECT SCAPEGOAT

Introducing Pilate...

Pilate's judgement hall was in close proximity, due north of the Temple. Extrabiblical sources portray Pilate as a cruel, imperious, and insensitive ruler who hated his Jewish subjects and took few pains to understand them.¹³ He stole money donated to the Temple (corban money) to build an aqueduct, and when the population of Jerusalem rioted in protest, he sent in soldiers, who killed many. He defiled Jerusalem more than once. **Lk 13:1** describes how he executed some Jews while they were worshipping at the Temple. Luke says, "There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices" (Lk 13:1).

These known facts about Pilate are often thought to render the gospel accounts incredible, for here Pilate is portrayed as weak, ineffectual, and cowardly, judicially fair enough to want to release Jesus but too cowardly to stand up to the Sanhedrin's browbeating tactics. This

¹² MacArthur, *Matthew* (Mt 27:11).

¹³ Josephus, Ant. 18.35 [2.2], 55–62 [3.12], 177–78 [6.5]; J.W. 2.169–77 [9.2–4]; Philo, Legat. 38; cf. Hoehner, Herod Antipas, 172–83.

transformation of Pilate's character, it is claimed, results from the evangelists' desire to exculpate the Romans and condemn the Jews.¹⁴

Pilate for whatever reason was softened on this notorious day. Many have noted that Pilate was less

Pilate's Quandary & Miscalculations

Pilate not only was amazed but in a quandary. He was convinced of Jesus' innocence and was repulsed by the chicanery of the chief priests and elders. Yet he did not dare offend them, because his own position with Rome was now precarious due to the contemptuous miscalculations he had previously made regarding Jewish religious convictions.

He had governed Judea for some four or five years, but his rule had been marked by several serious misjudgments that threatened his office and even his life.

First, he had deliberately offended the Jews by having his soldiers carry banners of Caesar's image into Jerusalem. This was idolatrous to them since Jerusalem was the city of the Messianic King. When a delegation of Jews persistently asked Pilate to remove the statues, he herded them into an amphitheater and threatened to have his soldiers cut off their heads if they did not desist. When the group bared their necks and threw themselves to the ground, defiantly asserting their willingness to die, Pilate withdrew both his threat and the banners. He had been sent to Palestine to keep the peace, not foment a revolution, which a massacre of those men would surely have precipitated.

Second, a short while later, Pilate forcefully stole the money from the Temple treasury to erect an aqueduct. When the Jews again openly rioted, Pilate sent soldiers disguised as civilians among them to brutally slaughter many of the unsuspecting and unarmed protesters. Luke's reference to "the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices" (**Lk 13:1**) record the details of this massacre.

Pilate's **third** public offense against the Jews was almost his undoing. He had special shields made for his guard near Jerusalem. Again, he engraved them with the image of Tiberius on the shields. This time the Jewish leaders appealed directly to Caesar, and Pilate's scheme backfired. Tiberius was more concerned about the genuine prospect of rebellion than the insincere flattery of Pilate, and he demanded that the shields be removed immediately.¹⁵

Pilate Later Commits Suicide

Pilate was now justifiably afraid that another riot by the Jews would cost him his office as governor.

Several years later Pilate ordered a senseless ambush of some Samaritan worshipers. Pilate was ordered Pilate to Rome to explain his actions. His political career was ended, and tradition holds that he eventually committed suicide in Gaul, to which he had been banished.¹⁶

C. JESUS, THE KING WHO CONQUERS FROM THE CROSS

A King Who Conquers from a Cross

Jesus doesn't need a scapegoat. Jesus is not just a king, He is the King of kings. He came to conquer. But his enemy wasn't Rome. He is a conquering king, but he did not come to enlist soldiers or start a political campaign. He came to be "pierced for our transgressions." As fallen

¹⁴ Carson. *Matthew*, Kindle Locations 19204-19213.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Mt 27:12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

human beings, we don't understand a King so gracious that he takes up the Cross as his throne and he begins to conquer his enemies there. Enemies? Yes, Christ's enemies are sin, death, and hell. Christ conquers from the Cross.

The early church called him "Christus Victor" The Conquering Christ whose throne is a Cross.

- How can someone so **kingly** not destroy his accusers? Christ is the king who conquers sin, death and hell.

III. The One on trial is the **divine Substitute**, Mt 27:15-26.

- How can someone so **divine** be a servant? Christ is the servant of YHWH
- How can someone so **kingly** not destroy his accusers? Christ is the king who conquers death
- How can someone so **righteous** be put to death as a criminal? Christ is a substitute.

A. THE PASSOVER AMNESTY (Mt 27:15-19)

We now come to an ancient tradition in Israel called the "Passover Amnesty." Pilate had adopted the tradition where one prisoner would go free, and in the prisoner's place, a Passover Lamb would be slain. Let's read about it.

Mt 27:15-19, "Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. 16 And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. 17 So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" 18 For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him [Jesus] up. 19 Besides, 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."

The Mishnah Record of Passover Amnesty

In the Mishnah (*the written record of the Jewish Oral law and traditions from around 200AD*), one of the most ancient traditions recorded is the "Passover amnesty."¹⁷ It is said to be a tradition that dates to the time of Jesus. And here we have it recorded in Mt 27. Essentially the Passover amnesty allowed for a prisoner to be set free and a Passover Lamb to be slaughtered in its place.

We see that Matthew is once again pointing to Jesus as the Passover Lamb that is slaughtered for this prisoner, Barabbas. It is clear that Matthew is pointing to Jesus as the ultimate Substitute: "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29).

This too is fulfilled prophecy.

"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." (Isa 53:6).

¹⁷ William L. Lane. *Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 552–53. Pesachim 8:6, from the Mishnah, the written record of the Jewish Oral law and traditions (from around 200AD), states: "they may slaughter a Passover lamb for one... whom they have promised to release from prison."

One Man Should Die for All

It was Caiaphas, the high priest that year who said, amazingly, in **John 11:49-50**, “You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.” So even the high priest prophesied of this divine Substitution.

This substitution was divinely planned. The Romans had three crosses prepared: one for Barabbas, and the other two for his insurrectionist companions. It would not go according to Pilate’s plan, but God’s plan. Jesus would take Barabbas’ place.

Christ, Our Passover Lamb

“Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7). Jesus is the Lamb slaughtered for the prisoner. We are redeemed “not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet 1:18-19).

The one truth that converted my soul the night I was born again in September of 1989 was this truth. Keith Craft, my spiritual father, said, “If you the entire world were perfect and you were the only sinner on planet earth, Christ loves you so much that he would have gladly died just for you.” Those words opened my heart to the love of God, and in that moment, I was born again. Thank you, Jesus.

B. PILATE’S QUESTION: WHAT EVIL HAS HE DONE? (Mt 27:20-23)

“Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. 21 The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” 22 Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified!” 23 And he said, “Why? What evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!” (Mt 27:20-23).

Regardless of the crowd’s fickleness, we should ask, how can someone so **righteous** be put to death as a criminal? Pilate’s second question: “What evil has he done?” is one that should be noted. What evil has Christ done? None! Why must he be die? Christ is a divine substitute described in Isaiah 53.

C. PILATE’S HANDWASHING: Nails in our Pockets (Mt 27:24)

Mt 27:24, “So 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.”

Washing one’s hands in public was never done by the Romans. This was a Jewish custom. But Pilate was terribly afraid of disrupting the Passover Feast. Hundreds of thousands of people had travelled there to celebrate, and he wanted to abdicate responsibility in some way. Pilate is not likely being sympathetic to Jesus. He is really just looking out for himself.

Martin Luther Quote

Pilate, thought trying to wash his hands is not the only guilty one. We all condemned Jesus with our sins. As Martin Luther said, “We all walk around with his nails in our pockets.”

D. OUR LORD’S CHOICE: WOUNDED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS (Mt 27:25-27)

Mt 27:25, “And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” 26 Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.”

The deep human suffering begins. Jesus is **scourged**. Barabbas is set free. Jesus is “delivered” to be crucified.

Scourging was possibly the worst kind of flogging administered by ancient courts. While the Jews administered whippings in the synagogues for certain offenses, these were mild in comparison to scourging. The Jews would limit their scourgings to 39 lashes (**Deut 25:1-3**, “Forty stripes may be given him, but not more”). For the Romans, scourging was not normally a form of execution, but it certainly was brutal enough to be fatal in many cases. A person certainly could be beaten to death by the scourge if that was desired.

Cat-o-nine-tails

Jesus was stripped of all his clothing and tied to a post by his wrists with his hands high enough over his head to virtually lift him up off the ground. The Roman scourging was so severe it was sometimes fatal. The Lord was flogged dozens and dozens of times with a whip called the “Cat-o-nine tails”. This whip had jagged fish bones, metal, and glass, and lead balls woven into the whip. The lead balls would create huge whelps on the Lord’s back and legs, and the fish bones and other debris would literally rip open the whelps.

Eusebius, the third-century Christian historian, interviewed some who had witnessed a Roman flogging and described it this way: “The sufferer’s veins were laid bare, and the very muscles and tendons and bowels of the victim were opened to exposure.”

After this Roman beating, our Lord would have lost so much blood that his body was in shock. He was in critical condition after the beating.

The New Testament Concentrates on Reconciliation

Yet the New Testament does not concentrate on the physical agony of Jesus, or even on the emotional pain of being rejected by the world, deserted by his friends. What it concentrates on is — and this is what is unique: Jesus was cut off from his Father for us as he carried our sins. Would you turn right back in the Bible to Isaiah 53:4-6 —

“Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
5 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.”

Who is Jesus to you?

We saw the Son of God on trial today. C.S. Lewis, author of the Chronicles of Narnia, said Christ’s claims made him one of three things: a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord of all. He was either lying, out of his mind crazy, or he is Lord. He is either the devil from hell or He is the Lord God Almighty. He cannot be anything in between.

Hear me today: Jesus is Lord. Every knee shall bow, including the chief priests and Pilate. Every knee will bow. King Herod, Barabbas, the Roman soldiers who mock Jesus.

What about you? Will you bow your knee to Jesus Christ as your Servant of Redemption? Is He your King? Is He your Substitute?