

# Matthew 27:11-26

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[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. We're looking at Matthew 27 verses 11 to 26 and it's an amazing passage and we can look at it in a number of different ways.

You can look at it, the contrast between Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, and Jesus. There's a great contrast there. Four times the passage calls Pilate the governor, literally the commander. And Jesus is in front of him. This contrast, he who will one day judge the world, allowed himself to be judged and condemned. You can look at it in the comparison between Judas and Pontius Pilate. There's a lot of similarities between the two.

The one at the start of chapter 27 and our passage today. We can look at it with the contrast of Jesus and Barabbas. We can look at Pilate as a leader and how so many of the world leaders are like him.

And all of those ways are legitimate ways of looking at this passage. And I'd encourage you to think about them. And there's lots of things that I'd want you to know, but there's four things that I need you to know this morning.

[ 1 : 17 ] Four things that I need you to know. And the first thing that I need you to know is that Jesus is a willing saviour. Jesus is a willing rescuer, a willing saviour.

Look at verses 12 to 14. They're accusing him, the chief priests and the elders, the senior pastors and the lay leaders.

And yet he does not open his mouth. He doesn't answer a thing. Look at verse 14. But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor, the commander was greatly amazed. So there you have the silence of Jesus. And it's interesting is that when you compare Jesus with this notorious prisoner in verse 16, Barabbas. This notorious prisoner.

This popular prisoner. He may well have been an insurrectionist. A kind of guerrilla type man. Somebody who was trying to strike back at the Romans.

[ 2 : 25 ] He's a macho type figure. He carries the favour. He's a man of the people. And striking out against the Romans. And there's this picture, isn't there, of this popular hero.

And then the contrast between that and Jesus in verses 12 to 14. And Jesus looks weak and wimpy. He doesn't even answer their accusations.

And of course, we're back to that chapter that we've been to a number of times, aren't we, over the last few weeks. Isaiah 53. Verse 7. Where we see that Jesus is carrying out the ministry of the suffering servant of God.

Where it's said of the Messiah, God's king. He was oppressed. And afflicted. And yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And like a sheep that is silent before his shearers.

So he did not open his mouth. And so Jesus not answering their questions is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of submission to God's plan and God's purpose.

[ 3 : 32 ] And submission is very often not a sign of weakness. But actually it's a sign of strength held in check.

And that is what you have here. His silence, his refusal to answer the charges. Was an indication that here was God's king. Here was God's Messiah submitting to his father's will.

It was an indication that he was willing to suffer for my sins. That he was willing to take the punishment that I deserve.

And I want and I need a willing Jesus. We go to Northern Ireland. Most summers we're not going this year because of COVID.

But we go. And one of the best things that we do when we go is go to the Antrim show. It's an agricultural show. And the best thing about the agricultural show is the sheep shearing contest. And

so you've got this kind of contraption of men standing on a platform with shearers.

[ 4 : 35 ] And then behind them are all these sheep in pens. All kind of butting each other and mearing one another. And the horn goes or the buzzer goes.

And they grab the sheep and pull the sheep to them. And the sheep lies on its back silently and lets them shear. He submits. To the shearer. And so we see Jesus.

That's the picture. The submission and the silence of Jesus. And it tells you that he was willing to suffer for you. A willing Jesus. Secondly, see with me what we need.

We need a righteous Jesus. Verse 19. A righteous Jesus. Pilate's wife. It's a funny reference isn't it? Pilate's wife. Mrs. Pilate. She must have been desperate. Pilate. She sends a message to Pilate. While the court is in session. And she says, verse 19. Can you see it? Have nothing to do with that righteous man. For I've suffered much because of him today in a dream.

[ 5 : 36 ] Her dreams are disturbed. Was it God who disturbed her dreams? But she has this conviction, doesn't she? She has this conviction that this man, Jesus, is innocent.

Have nothing to do with, what does she call him? She calls him a righteous man. Now, we don't know exactly what Pilate's wife heard about Jesus.

But it wouldn't have been hard. But can you see the content of her witness? Jesus is that righteous man. And that is the testimony of the whole of the New Testament.

It picks up the witness of Pilate's wife and insists, It is very, very important to you and to me that Jesus is a righteous man. That he is in the right. In Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 15, we have that amazing verse.

Us as Christians, we don't have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our every weakness. But one who has been tempted in every way as we are and yet is without sin.

[ 6 : 39 ] The New Testament insists on it. It is vital that he is righteous. He is innocent. Hebrews 7 teaches us that Jesus, our high priest, did not have to offer sacrifices for our sins, like the Jewish high priest.

Why? Because he didn't have sin. And Jesus said of himself and of his father, I always do what pleases him. Judas, in our passage last week, do you remember?

He said, I have betrayed innocent blood. And so it's very, very important to you and to me that Jesus be a righteous man who has never sinned. Why is that so important?

It's so important because he cannot give you his righteousness if he does not have it himself. He cannot give you his perfect righteousness unless he has it himself.

And so if Jesus is going to be made sin for us and we are going to be made the righteousness of God, then in him he must have all righteousness.

[ 7 : 54 ] His obedience and his perfect life and his righteousness will be put to my account. And if my sin is going to be charged to Jesus' account, he must have righteousness to confer on me, to give it to me.

The burden of my sin goes upon him and defiles him. And the beauty of his righteousness comes upon me and clothes me.

He has to be a righteous man. There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. And that's why it's so, so vitally important that you and I have a righteous Jesus.

Just a little side for a moment. Can you see, it's really interesting, isn't it, who speaks the truth about Jesus? Pilate's wife. She's a pagan woman.

She's not a believer. She's not a follower. And it's surprising to me that again and again, as we read through the passion narratives, again and again, the truth is spoken about Jesus by people who don't trust him, who don't believe in him and who don't follow him.

[ 9 : 05 ] The unlikely instruments and the unusual places where someone will declare a true witness about Jesus, where you never expect it.

A willing Jesus. A righteous Jesus. A righteous Jesus. And thirdly, a cleansing Jesus. Pilate tries something.

Pilate tries something. He's not convinced Jesus is worthy of death. Pilate tries something. And he had a Passover amnesty in which he released one prisoner to the Jews.

Maybe this was trying to cushion the Jews or soften them up a little bit. Trying to win their favor, releasing one of their favorites. He's been quite harsh with them.

He's treated them meanly in the past. But at any rate, he's decided that he would try and get them to ask for Jesus to be released. That he could get out of this bind that he finds himself in.

[10:04] And unfortunately, the chief priests and the elders, they persuade and they kill the crowds and they win them over. And so that when it was time for him to ask, who is it?

Which prisoner would you like to be released? They say, Barabbas. Well, Pilate has painted himself into a corner. He said, why?

What shall I do then with this Jesus? And he allows the mob to become the jury. Do you see that? Very much like what's happening in this country.

He allows the mob to become the jury. And then he says, what wrong has he done? And the mob cry, let him be crucified.

The chant goes up. Pilate has recourse to a sacrament. Pilate in front of the crowd, he gets a basin.

[11:08] And he pours water in the basin. And he begins to wash his hands publicly in front of them all. Before all the people.

And with this sacrament, with this sign, Pilate has a word. He has word and sacrament. And his word is, I am innocent. Of this man's blood.

Second time we feared it, isn't it? Do you remember the chief priest to Judas? They say to Judas, you see to it yourselves. And Pilate, in his washing of his hands, says, I'm innocent of this man's blood.

You see to it yourself. And we say, Pilate, that was a brilliant piece of theatre. Bravo. A brilliant piece of theatre.

A brilliant move. Washing your hands. Yes. Yes. It's so very clever. We get the symbolism, Pilate. Even though we live in a different culture.

[12:12] Even though we live in a different time, Pilate. It's so clever. We get it. We get what you're trying to convey. But Pilate, what will you do tonight? What will you do tonight when you wake up in a cold sweat.

And you look in the darkness of the night at your hands. And you need more water, Pilate. The blood is awfully difficult, isn't it? To get off your hands, Pilate.

It's kind of ironic, Pilate. That the cleansing from the water in your basin won't clean you. The only thing that will cleanse you of your guilt is the blood of the prisoner.

Don't you think it's ironic, Pilate? Isn't it ironic that in the years and hundreds and thousands of years that lie ahead, that millions of Christians, week after week, will confess their Lord and accuse his judge.

And as they confess Jesus Christ as Lord, who suffered under Pontius Pilate. How much water does it take, Pilate, to wash your shameful name out of the Apostles' Creed?

[13:27] You wash your hands in a basin. But the only cleansing that there is to be found is in the blood of the prisoner you're condemning.

And I want a cleansing Jesus and I need a cleansing Jesus. I need a cleansing Jesus so I don't have to go back to my own acts, my own kind of self-made-up acts to cleanse my guilt.

Isaiah says, though your sins be as scarlet, through the blood of Jesus, they can be made as white as snow. You really do have a cleansing Jesus.

1 John 1 verse 7, we use it often as the assurance of pardon, that the blood of Jesus, God's Son, keeps on cleansing us from every kind of sin.

And so we can say to Pilate this morning, no, no, not in that basin. Not in your made-up, concocted sacraments. Not in your acts.

[14:39] Not in your deeds. Not in your own works. Not in trying your best will you find cleansing. Not in a new start. But there is a fountain filled with blood.

You might not like Cowper's imagery. But whether you like it or not, there is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins. And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

We sing with the children, what can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. And so let me ask you, where are you going to get cleansing from?

Let me ask you, where are you going to deal with the guilt that you know needs to be dealt with?

And I offer you today a cleansing saviour, a cleansing Jesus.

Last of all, a substitutionary Jesus. A substitutionary Jesus. I couldn't think of a kind of better turn of phrase. Look at verse 26. Then he delivered Barabbas to them.

[15:54] We've seen that wording again, haven't we? Jesus being handed over. Jesus being handed over. But here it is Barabbas that is handed over. This time to be released. But Jesus is

handed over to be flogged.

Flogged. Verse 26. Then he released for them Barabbas and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified. The scourging, the flogging.

The Jews had a law that a prisoner or somebody that was going to be flogged could only be flogged 40 times. But the Romans, they had no limit.

They weren't bothered by that. It was just up to their strength or it was up to the whim of the person who was doing the flogging. The victim would be stripped. He'd be tied to a post.

The whip would have little leather strips on it. And embedded into the leather strips would be bits of lead or stone or bone.

[16:54] And so as it whipped the victim's back, it would tear and it would cut and it would turn the flesh into a pulp. It was even known to cut them so badly that their bones would be visible, their entrails exposed.

There are accounts of victims dying from the flogging even before they got to the capital punishment. by crucifixion. So Jesus was flogged and then he was handed over to be crucified. And do you see the exchange? It's really simple, isn't it? Verse 26. Verse 26. Barabbas is released. Verse 26. Jesus is delivered over to be crucified.

It's really simple. You can't miss it, can you? You can't say it any more plainly. Jesus died for Barabbas. Jesus died in place of Barabbas.

There are lots of theories of the atonement of what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross. I want to explain to you this morning the Barabbas theory. The Barabbas theory of the atonement.

[18:11] And I expect that Barabbas had a better understanding of the cross than many of us do. And it was simply this, that Jesus died for Barabbas. Literally, substitution in his place.

Jesus died the death that Barabbas should have died on the cross. I'm not saying that Barabbas was a believer and a follower and a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

But can you see in the literal situation that Jesus was the substitute for Barabbas? Barabbas was released.

Jesus was delivered over to be crucified. A substitutionary Jesus. A Jesus who has died for you in your place.

Taking the punishment that you rightly deserve and you recognize that you deserve it. And I wonder if Barabbas ever thought about that. We'll never know, will we?

[19:18] At least we won't for a long time. I wonder whether Barabbas, when he was on his way back to join his chums, that if he ever happened to go by or to go anywhere near Golgotha, that if he ever wandered near that place of the cross, he cast an eye to that center cross.

And I wonder if he ever gave it any thought, I wonder if he said, Jesus, Messiah, died for Barabbas. In my place.

Condemned he stood. And that is what the cross ought to mean to you and I. Because I need and you need a willing saviour.

And you need and I need a righteous saviour. And you need and I need desperately a cleansing saviour. And wonderfully, Jesus was our substitute who has taken our place in my place.

Condemned he stood. Hallelujah. What a saviour. Let's pray. Amen.