

What Evil Hath He Done?

Pilate was willing, even determined, at every stage to release the Lord Jesus Christ. He knew Jesus did not deserve death. His own wife was eager for him to have nothing to do with Jesus' execution. He knew the Jews had delivered Jesus for envy's sake but hoped the people would be pleased to have 'their king' released when offered the choice of a murderer or their Messiah as a Passover feast act of clemency. Yet despite exonerating Jesus repeatedly and declaring he could find no fault in Christ and no cause for Christ's death, Pilate was helpless to prevent the Saviour's crucifixion.

Pilate's weakness

Pilate's protests do not absolve him from guilt. Indeed, his failure is a sad indication of his weakness, as was his readiness to have Jesus scourged as a mere expediency. Pilate represented the rule of law in Judaea and it was his duty to uphold the laws of Rome and dispense justice fairly and properly. However, a higher justice was at work and a grander law than Rome's was being fulfilled by the death of Jesus Christ. Utilising the hypocrisy of the Jews and the cowardice of Pilate, this day God's law would be honoured and divine justice satisfied.

From Messiah to pariah

It is easy to forget it is only a few days since the Lord Jesus was lauded and worshipped as He entered Jerusalem on what we sometimes call palm Sunday. What made the people who praised Jesus as the Messiah on Sunday call for His destruction on Friday? What accounts for the speed with which their minds were swayed and the clamour for Christ's death became so intense? Mark tells us, "The chief priests moved the people". Religion is a powerful motivator and rejection and condemnation by the priests was clearly an influence. However, a deeper evil stirred. At the heart of the rejection of Christ was the deceitful heart of man, and man will not be subject to God or willingly accept the Lord of glory to reign over him.

"Crucify him"

Nevertheless, that the chief priests could secure such a U-turn in the minds of the people is notable and suggests this element in the proceedings was again more organised and premeditated than first appears. Matthew tells us, "the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus". Not only was Barabbas the prisoner of choice but the call to crucify Jesus was loudly insisted upon and repeatedly voiced.

A biased crowd

Remember, it was still early in the morning and it does not appear this 'multitude' was altogether a fair representation of the common people present in Jerusalem at the time. The crowd was likely highly biased comprising the priests themselves who came in large numbers and their servants and officers. Others in Jerusalem were more sympathetic. A few hours later as Jesus was led to the cross Luke tells us "there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him".

Barabbas – a man like us

John calls Barabbas a robber. Mark calls him an insurrectionist and a murderer. These titles have typical significance. Barabbas was released and the Lord went to the cross. In this Barabbas may be likened to all of God's elect in their state of nature who were released and set free from the condemnation of God's law when the Lord Jesus Christ, carrying their crimes and bearing their sin, was condemned and killed in their place.

Captives to sin

We have robbed God of His glory, rebelled against His rule and brought death on ourselves by our actions. We are prisoners of Satan, bound to sin and chained to unbelief. Like Barabbas we are convicted by the law and confined to a pit with no means of escape. We are worthy of death, by nature children of wrath under condemnation and deserving punishment.

Adopting grace

Yet the elect are also children of God by adopting grace. Barabbas's name means, 'the son of the father' and those criminals who obtained God's mercy went free when Christ was taken, condemned and died in their place, suffering as

their Substitute, representing them as Surety, according to the will of the Father.

Pilate backs down

The clamour for the death of Jesus Christ was great and loud amongst the people and as they became more and more agitated Pilate began to be concerned about the safety of the city and the potential for trouble beyond his ability to cope. The stakes were high. Pilate tried to distance himself from the judgment by publicly washing his hands as if to say he would not take the blame for this act. He declared, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it". He then meekly handed Christ into the hands of his soldiers to be scourged again as a prelude to being crucified.

Amen

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