

# THE KINGS OF THIS PRESENT AGE AND THE KINGDOM

LUKE 23:1-25

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In our passage today, the second part of the third movement of Jesus' passion and suffering, we see the trial of the Son of Man before the Gentile kings of this present age.

The Jewish teachers and leaders of Israel sitting in official session have found Jesus guilty of claiming to be the Divine Son of Man (which implies also the very Divine Son of God, cf. Daniel 7:13-14, Luke 22:66-71, see last sermon on Luke's Gospel). On motion on the floor of the Jewish Session, (not all agreed to this by "common consent", cf. Luke 23:51) the Session of the visible church formally acted against the Lord Jesus, and now would seek to demit him from the Messianic Office's of Prophet, Priest and King.

Yet the Jewish Council does not have the authority to actually convict Jesus to a death sentence (John 18:31), so they combine forces and unify with Pontius Pilate and King Herod.

The Jewish Council has jurisdiction over the Jews and Jesus as a Jew, but they cannot execute the death sentence upon Jesus; they must seek greater Gentile authorities to convict Jesus.

As Klaus Schilder said: "The church thirsts for Jesus' blood here, but only the secular authorities can pour it out" (*Christ on Trial*, pg. 221).

As we proceed through Dr. Luke's Gospel and learn about, review and reflect upon our Lord's Passion, let us make sure we stay focused on Jesus Christ and the larger themes of redemptive-history in which our Lord is fulfilling.

If we merely look for immediate "practical application" from the Passion, such as saying "look at how the soldiers treated Jesus, isn't that cruel, and see how much he loves us," we might miss the larger themes (although Jesus does love us and the soldiers were indeed very cruel, etc). Let us focus on Christ and the larger redemptive-historical themes to see why Luke under the inspiration of the Spirit wrote his Gospel like he did.

We should note that one larger redemptive-historical theme in Jesus' trial is that Israel "goes back to Egypt" in the most disgusting manner possible here in our passage! Israel goes to those who hold her in captivity and overrule her oppressively; Israel represented by the Jewish Council seeks not the help of God, but resorts to violence and seeks unity in Rome the "house of bondage" *in order to kill their Messiah-King!*

This is like Israel joining forces with Pharaoh to put Moses and Aaron to death- -but far worse! This is like Israel joining forces with King Nebuchadnezzar in order to put Daniel and his friends to death- -but far worse. This is Israel joining forces with Pontius Pilate of *Rome* to put the King of kings and the Lord of lords to death!

The path from the High Priest's home to the session of the Jewish Council to Pilate's house has become the way back to Egypt for Israel- -forsaking the salvation and redemption and exodus that can be found and experienced only in Jesus Christ!

At Jesus' birth he had to go to Egypt to flee death from those in Israel; now at Jesus' death Israel acts with "Egypt" or what Egypt represents in redemptive-history, finally to accomplish the death of Messiah. Messiah is Jesus Christ; he is the King who would deliver his people from bondage, oppression and set up His eternal Kingdom as he has told the assembly (22:66-71); however this Messianic King is not the one they give their worship and obedience to, here Israel worships and obeys Caesar rather than God- *they give to Caesar what belongs to God alone.*

As Schilder wrote: "[Israel] asks for the privilege of eating out of Pharaoh's hand again. It asks the death sentence for the very One who is the fulfillment of Moses" (*ibid*, pg. 227).

More particularly, the text tells us specifically that the "whole company" arose and brought him before Pilate (23:1). This whole company is representative of Israel, but also more specifically is made up of chief priests (22:66; noting again that at least 2 men, Joseph and Nicodemus, did not approve or were perhaps absent the assembly and couldn't vote by proxy).

The Levitical priesthood represented by the chief priests of Israel are handing over the Lamb of God to make an abominable sacrifice in the very courts of Rome. The chief priests according to Aaron make judgment against the Priest-King according to the order of Melchizedek.

In the judgment of the chief priests over Messiah is their resignation from any holy office they might have held before. This Aaronic order will become obsolete (cf. Heb. 8:13; 10:19ff) in the death of Messiah, and these seeds of the serpent will be formally demitted from their redemptive-historical office by God himself.

Jesus before Pontius Pilate (23:1-5): "...*Suffered under Pontius Pilate...*"- *Apostle's Creed.*

Pontius Pilate was the fifth Roman governor who ruled over Judea (A.D. 26-36). According to the Jewish writer Philo, Pilate was notorious for his cruelty and coarseness; he was a wicked, self-centered tyrant, who respected no one's feelings.

Just so that we better understand the relationship between the Jews and Pilate at this time in history, and particularly in light of the unified bond that the Sanhedrin and Pilate form in the murder of Jesus Christ, we should be reminded that when Pilate first took office, he entered Jerusalem with his soldiers marching with the Roman military standards.

These military standards were considered idolatrous by the Jews and so there was great protest and violence- - because Pilate wanted to avoid the mob's violence and an unnecessary uprising that might get to Caesar and cause his administration to be a hindrance to Caesar's rule, Pilate gave in to the Jews and the soldiers lowered their standards while in Jerusalem.

Later Pilate, just to cause aggravate and rile up the Jews again, entered their Holy Temple and confiscated temple tithes for his own government project. The point: there had been a history of friction and hatred between Pilate and the Jews...now the Jews are seeking his help.

The accusation of the Jews (23:2): *"We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king."*

What were the religious authorities' charges against Jesus Christ? (1 and 2) "We have found this man misleading our nation (sedition or inciting the people to revolt) and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar" (23:2a); and 3) "He says he is the Christ" and they mean merely an earthly king or Christ (23:2b).

The Council of the Jews lies about the first two charges because they are ultimately politically motivated against Jesus; Jesus has never misled the nation as some religious agitator- -he has taught openly and peacefully -not as a zealot and insurrectionist. To interest Rome in their charges against Jesus, they must characterize Jesus as a threat to Rome who is not only a political trouble-maker, but one who actually claims to be a king (which would threaten Caesar's crown).

Jesus has specifically told the people "to give to Caesar" the taxes that belong to him as they give to God what one owes to Him! Luke 20:25). The Council in lying about Jesus forbidding the Jews to give tribute tax to Caesar is politically motivated because the tribute tax would bring financial risk to Rome and Pilate is the financial administrator of Rome (as governor; see Bock, pg. 1811).

What we should note is the hypocrisy of the Sanhedrin; the Sanhedrin hated Romans, and particularly Pontius Pilate. For them to willingly bring their victim to him, made Pilate realize that their allegations were probably false from the very beginning and disingenuous; it is highly improbable that he ever thought the council was actually telling the truth. Governor Pilate would have thought:

“Why are they coming to me now, throwing this poor man on the mercy of Rome, when they themselves do not care for Romans, especially Roman laws and threats to Rome’s peace.” He might have thought further in fact: “They have Moses’ Law, why are they suddenly committing themselves to uphold Caesar’s Law when they have spent a great deal of their lives complaining that the two laws conflict with one another!?”

As Geldenhuys wrote: “What could so suddenly have actuated them [the Sanhedrin] to come forward as champions of Roman honor and Roman interests?” (NICNT, pg. 592).

Matthew says more about Pilate’s knowledge of the Sanhedrin’s motives:

*ESV Matthew 27:18 For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.* (cf. Mark 15:10).

The Council is referring in the third charge of Christ saying that he is a king, or an Anointed One (Messiah) to Jesus saying: “...*From now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God*” (22:69) referring to the eternal kingdom that Messiah would inherit as prophesied by the Prophet Daniel many years prior:

*ESV Daniel 7:13-14: I saw in the night visions, and 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. “ 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 Roman governor’s response to the allegations (23:3a): “*Are you the King of the Jews?*” This particular charge interests Pilate because it might threaten his sovereign rule over his territory (see John 18:33-38).

Jesus’ answer on implied oath before God and man was (23:3b): “*You have said so*” or literally, “It is as you say” (or “I am in agreement with that, yes!”).

The Roman governor’s authoritative pronouncement as the gavel comes down (23:4): “*Not guilty!*” (In verse 4 in Greek the emphasis in Pilate’s verdict is placed at the beginning of the phrase to stress the negative or “not guilty” verdict; read literally: “*Nothing, I find of guilt, in this man.*”).

Now we should be reminded here and understand the fact that Pontius Pilate is a governor of Rome. Rome had given Pilate as governor legal jurisdiction over the Jewish people. According to Roman power and policy, all of Pontius Pilate’s acts were acts of the larger Kingdom of Rome. Pilate represented the authority of Rome or more broadly a representative of the temporal kingdom of man.

Not good enough for the Jewish teachers of Israel for Jesus to be let go “not guilty”. They now frantically respond to Pilate’s “not guilty!” with “you must reconsider”- he’s a

troublemaker and that is the last thing you want is a Jewish troublemaker- -this will threaten your position and the peace in Rome (23:5).

Getting a glance of the larger teaching in redemptive-history, especially with an eye toward Daniel's prophecy in chapter 7, we get a better understanding of what is going on here as Jesus is judged by Pilate. As I said before, the Levitical priesthood represented by the chief priests of Israel are making an abominable sacrifice here in the courts of Rome.

More particularly, Israel is subjecting Jesus at the feet of the very kingdom of iron and clay that He was prophesied as destroying through the establishment of His eternal kingdom.

*ESV Daniel 7:17-18: "These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. <sup>18</sup> But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever."*

Jesus is subjected to and judged by one of the four great beasts of the earth of the Prophecy of Daniel!

Yet we are told in Daniel 7:18 that the Messiah, the Son of Man will be victorious over this temporal judgment because *the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever!* Although Israel is rejecting her Messianic King and even committing treason against His holy and eternal kingdom, they are also forfeiting any right or claims to this eternal kingdom by their devotion to and alliance with one of the four beasts of Daniel!

So they say (23:5): *"He stirs up the people, teaching through all Judea, from Galilee even to this place."*

The Jewish Council has now formally allied themselves against the LORD and His Anointed One with the very powers of this present darkness! Jerusalem is in league with the four beasts of Daniel- -the beasts that have subjected Israel to suffering and murder- -the beasts that were to destroy all earthly and temporal kingdoms so that Messiah would reign over heaven and earth.

Jesus before Herod (23:6-16)

But Pilate is sly as a fox. He thinks to himself: "Hmmm, from Galilee, well that is Herod's jurisdiction; I will not answer to this Jewish mob and council, I will send this prophet on his way and let Herod deal with it" (23:6-7).

Convenient for Pilate and the Jewish mob that Herod just happened to be in Jerusalem for the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. Will Rogers once said, "There have been two great eras in American history, the passing of the buffalo and the passing of the buck." Pilate passed the buck to Herod; it was Herod's shekel now" (Quoted in Hughes, Vol. II. pg. 365).

In Pilate's passing the buck as it were, this was also a shrewd political maneuver for him. He and Herod had never seen eye to eye and were considered enemies, yet here Pilate even politically fixes a hostile breach at least temporarily by making Herod think that he is willing to consider his territory (since Jesus was a Galilean). Pilate doesn't want to make this decision by himself, and so by including Herod he makes Herod think that he is politically honoring his rule over the Jews.

Who was Herod (cf. Mark 6:14-25)? His full name was Herod Antipas and he was the son of Herod the Great, who John the Baptist had preached against, concerning his sinful lifestyle with his niece Herodias (daughter of Aristobulus, Herod's half-brother; wife of his half-brother Herod Philip). Herod was a half-Jewish king who served as a puppet-king of the Roman Empire.

King Herod had at first feared John the Baptist, but eventually he killed him. Herod killed the forerunner to the Messiah for preaching against his sins, being caught in a trap by Herodias' daughter Salome (Mark 6:22), and weakly against his own conscience beheaded John to please his lover. Now this same Herod would seek to kill the Messiah John pointed to in his prophetic ministry.

When Jesus is brought in, Herod is delighted to finally meet him and to see face to face the one who is causing quite a stir in his territory through his teachings (and he is probably delighted, grinning like a Cheshire cat as he thinks about how delightful it has been to hear that this Jesus has shaken up the Jewish Council -oh, how I love a religious fight, he might have thought!). Incidentally, Herod may have known that his father had tried to kill the Messiah at his birth, and perhaps he wanted the opportunity of killing him that his father was denied?!

Herod actually wants to see a sign from God (23:8c) because he had heard Jesus was quite powerful. Herod has no desire for Jesus' saving power and no interest in submitting to his sovereign authority as Son of God and Son of Man. Herod has no spiritual interest in Jesus Christ and the salvation and hope that can be found in him -rather his interest in Christ is pure unadulterated entertainment! Herod wants to see something miraculous, something cool, something that will blow his mind and thrill him!

Jesus is simply another court jester for Herod to laugh at, to be entertained by, to be dressed up as a kingly clown in purple robes or splendid clothing so that his soldiers can also mock him and be entertained by him (23:8-11). The very Son of God and Son of Man is made the laughing stock of the crowds; the One who will be enthroned at God's right hand is made the court jester by Herod.

And Jesus is silent before him (22:9). Jesus had spoken with many people; he had made known his Kingdom Gospel to all the crowds; he even responded to some of the allegations and questions put to him by the Jewish Council; but Jesus knows Herod's

conscience is seared, and that he is a reprobate with no hope but eternal wrath and hell (Herod's had plenty of opportunity to repent and has refused!).

**So Jesus remains silent before this present darkness for us.** As Isaiah prophesied about Jesus the Messiah many years before:

*ESV Isaiah 53:7-8: 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. <sup>8</sup> 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?*

As Herod interrogates Jesus, he remains silent, knowing that this Herod is an evil, unrepentant "fox" as he has called him before- -Herod is not one for whom Jesus came to live and die (23:9; cf. Luke 13:32).

The chief priests accuse Jesus before Herod seeking with focused aim and purpose vehemently to accuse him (23:10).

Herod as the typical evil ruler of this present age, because he is evil, and because Jesus is not "performing for him" as he had hoped begins to treat him contemptuously and mock him. Herod's soldiers gladly take part in this mocking-fest and clothe Jesus in splendid, regal, king-like clothing (23:11).

It is interesting how evil men can actually not only combine forces, but come to be friends through their acts of evil (23:12). Dr. Luke tells us that Herod and Pilate who had been at enmity with each other became friends that day. "A friend is a friend forever if the Lord's mocking and suffering is at the heart of it all..."

Combined sinful purposes, produces a life-long evil friendship! This is a fulfillment of Psalm 2:

*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, <sup>3</sup> "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." - Psalm 2:2-3*

The kings and rulers of this present age unite to kill Messiah and to attempt the dethroning of God himself. While Pilate and Herod were formerly at enmity with one another (v.12), they joined forces to crush the heel of the Seed of the Woman, the Son of Man and Son of God, ultimately because of the enmity God had sovereignly placed between the Seed of the serpent and the Seed of the Woman in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 3:14-19).

This new found friendship would be an allegiance and unity serving the Prince of the Power of the Air, the spirit that is at work in the unregenerate sons of disobedience (cf. Eph. 2:1-3).

Again, Pilate notes to the Jewish Council, that he has found Jesus “not guilty” (23:13-15). Even Herod in his judgment found Jesus “not guilty” (23:15). This is very important! There was nothing to convict Jesus on- -the rulers, the kings of the present age formally declare Jesus “not guilty”.

But politically, Jesus must be treated shamefully in order to make the Jewish people, particularly the unbelieving teachers of Israel- -happy. Pilate as Governor of the Kingdom of Rome, formally pronounces Jesus “not guilty” but he throws the Jewish Council a political bone: *“I will therefore punish and release him”* (23:16).

Nothing to blame Jesus for; nothing to pin on Jesus; Jesus is blameless, BUT he will be punished...then released.

But that is not good enough for the Jewish Council (and this is where it gets very ugly)!

Jesus is numbered with the transgressors (or criminals, Isaiah 53) and he is taken to be crucified (23:18-25); humanly speaking, there is no saving Jesus now! The minds have been made up; the evil has been done and will continue to be done- -in order to accomplish the sovereign will of God. As Acts 2:22-23 says:

*<sup>ESV</sup> Acts 2:22-23: “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know-<sup>23</sup> this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*

As we continue through Jesus’ Passion and crucifixion, we must keep in mind that betrayal, suffering and death was the goal of His Divine Messianic Mission (Luke 9:21-22; 51; John 12:27). Jesus had specifically said that he would be “handed over” or delivered into sinful hands:

*<sup>ESV</sup> Luke 9:44 “Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered [“handed over”] into the hands of men.”*

Ironically, the very thing that the Jewish Council claimed that Jesus had done: stirring up the people into insurrection (23:5) is exactly what a criminal named Barabbas was guilty of (23:18-19).

Jesus is being exchanged for a prisoner! The holy and spotless Lamb of God for a common brigand, thief and murderer! Barabbas was what we might call a member of the freedom fighters of organized terrorism, or part of the resistance movement, or part of the “rebel alliance and a traitor” ☹); one who used violence to accomplish his religious purposes (when one thinks of Barabbas modern terms like “pipe bombs”, “car bombs” and groups like “The Taliban” should come to mind).



Yet Pilate again as Roman governor, as an authority placed by God over an earthly kingdom who bears the sword as God's minister-servant (Romans 13:1ff), seeks to release Jesus knowing that he is not guilty (23:20ff).

As Pilate seeks to release Jesus, his political arms are tied and the crowds, the *vox populi* (voice of the people) deafens him to any inner moral strength or fiber, weakens any conscience involvement and objection that he might have had, as they cry: "***Crucify, crucify him!***" (23:21).

The Jewish Council who on a normal day thought crucifixion to be a cold, ruthless and horrible way to execute judgment, now approves wholeheartedly this form of execution - just because they are dealing with the Son of Man and the Son of God. In the Jewish Council's estimation, God must die!

Crucifixion was the harshest form of capital punishment and many Jews of Jesus' day were against it. This hard form of punishment can be traced historically back to the Persians; in Greece and Rome initially, only slaves were executed in this way. In Imperial Rome, foreigners (not Roman citizens) were also subjected to this horrendous form of execution (Bock, Vol. II, pg. 1830).

In light of his knowledge of the severe harshness of crucifixion, Pilate asks the crowd specifically (again!) as Jesus' advocate: "***Why, what evil has he done?***" (23:22). On any other day, with any other man, Pontius Pilate would have had no problem executing this death sentence; but today is a different day, Jesus is a different man...

But the crowds kept shouting: "***Crucify, crucify Him!***" The "Holy" (!) City of Jerusalem is no longer filled with Psalms of Messianic joy and glory. No longer do the people in the Holy City sing: 'Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the LORD' - now the hatred drips from their lips as the city is bloodguilty before God. Rather than worshipping Jesus as the King that He truly is, they further and finally reject Him as the Messiah who has come to bring life.

Again, Pilate is resolved to merely punish Jesus and then release him (22:22b), Dr. Luke emphasizing once again that the governor of the kingdom of man has formally pronounced Jesus "not guilty" and blameless before God and man. The formal records of Rome historically read stand as a memorial to Jesus' death and His innocence and why we as Christians confess: "I believe...He suffered under Pontius Pilate..."

Yet the innocent verdict and whipping was not good enough for the hostile, unbelieving crowd! They want blood- they are on a Divine "witch hunt" of the most magnanimous and eternally consequential proportions!

In fact, the people were urgent desiring punishment by crucifixion.

*“They were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed” -23:23.*

As is often the case, justice and truth does not prevail in a world of sin and misery; just the miserably sinful sound of the evil voice of the people. Dr. Luke says that the crowd’s voices prevailed over justice and truth and any kind of conscience that might be displayed here (22:23).

Pilate politically makes a decision that will have (literally!) eternal consequences. He gives into the people’s request for Jesus’ murder (playing the political game as he was born to sinfully play it!) (23:24).

If we had asked Pilate after Jesus’ crucifixion what were his reasons for doing what he did in listening to the voice of the people, he would probably have said that it was better that one be dead than there be mass violence in Rome (if he was to be totally honest, he would have also said that he didn’t want to lose the support of the people, cf. John 19 when the crowds suggest that if Pilate does not kill Jesus that he is not a “friend of Caesar’s”).

What did Pilate do here? Pilate clearly pronounces Jesus “not guilty” or “innocent” according the authority God had given him as a Roman ruler. Yet because he loved peace and popularity with the people, Pilate succumbed to their pressure and did what he knew to be wrong. This reminds us of Pilate’s question that the Apostle John records when Jesus is before him:

*“What is truth?” - John 18:38*

Pilate reveals here that the only truth for him is not objective truth revealed from God, but truth that has been socially or intellectually created or constructed to do the most good for one’s self; this is Pilate’s truth and so we must understand that this kind of monstrously sinful thinking is not merely “postmodern” but very premodern in that it is the thinking that goes back to the Garden of Eden when the serpent asks in direct contradiction to objective truth revealed by God: *Has God really said?* - Gen. 3:2-6

What is truth indeed? *And the serpent hisses...*

Well, the truth is that Pilate actually did what God has foreordained from eternity past for him to do and accomplish! Pilate, the crowds, and Herod acted sinfully against God, but nonetheless acted according to God’s sovereign purposes, so that Messiah might die for the sins of His people. The Roman Empire acts through the governorship and authority of Pontius Pilate in sending Messiah to death.

Sin can twist reality, but in Christ objective TRUTH is revealed on the cross; sin can cause great injustice and a misuse of governmental authority, but there is the justice of God revealed in Christ on the cross.

What the fall has greatly affected here in this present age, where sin twists and spins the truth, and injustice is thought of as just - God heals on the cross of Jesus Christ. Here on the cross, we find a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who heals us from our sins and takes the justice of God upon himself so that we might be redeemed and made free from slavery and oppression to death, sin and Satan.

And do we not see what this death of Messiah was all about, what it all meant in what Pilate does? The Bible tell us that Jesus was exchanged for a sinner; Barabbas who deserved to die for insurrection, rebellion and murder against Rome was released- -set free- -redeemed, and Jesus would take his place (23:25).

Matthew calls Barabbas a “notorious prisoner” (27:16), John calls him a “robber” (18:40), and Mark in his gospel notes that Barabbas committed murder in an insurrection (15:7).

Humanly speaking, one of the reasons why Judas betrayed the Lord Jesus was because he was not a fire-brand insurrectionist against Rome; Jesus came the first time extending peace and reconciliation with God- -Judas wanted a Messianic Insurrectionist who would overthrow all pagan kingdoms that ruled over Israel. Ironically, Jesus was convicted and found guilty of this crime (Luke 23:2, 5); Jesus was unjustly exchanged for an insurrectionist and died the death of what an insurrectionist against Rome deserved.

Pontius Pilate frees a known murderous insurrectionist against Rome- -he unjustly places even his own government and people in danger- -in order to listen to the popular pressure of the people and enact punishment upon the Lamb of God!

What is interesting to note is that the name “Barabbas” literally means in Hebrew “son of the father”; Barabbas, “son of the father” is released although guilty, and Jesus, the Son of the Father, is handed over or delivered to be killed in exchange. The wrong “son of the Father” is going scot free, and so Israel frees the wrong “son of the father” to their eternal plight and peril (see Bock, Vol. II, pg. 1823).

This is what the gospel is all about: Jesus, the perfect and blameless and holy Son of God and Son of Man who was “not guilty” before the tribunal of the kingdom of man, became guilty before God so that the sinful, the murders, the rebellious might be saved, redeemed, set free!

If ever there was a picture that describes Jesus’ Divine Messianic Mission at the beginning of Dr. Luke’s Gospel about setting the captives free:

*ESV Luke 4:18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed..."*

What is important to note about what Jesus did here, is that he is not merely laying down his life in exchange for Barabbas, but he laying down his life to set the captives to death, hell and the devil free through his agony and death by crucifixion on the cross!

The cross is where the Great Exchange occurs for all of God's people elected from the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-14). Christ lays down his life to set those who are sinfully lost and bound in captivity to sin and hell and death and the devil.

Barabbas goes free; Jesus is sent to die. The guilty one is pardoned (forgiven!) and goes free; the innocent and blameless One is pronounced guilty!

Barabbas had committed rebellion and murder against the Roman kingdom of man and against Caesar and this was a great crime and sin; the Teachers of Israel were guilty of a greater sin in that their betrayal of and punishment of the Messiah.

Jesus would now die in the place of sinners who had committed rebellion and murder against the Kingdom of God and against God himself!

And so the second half of the third movement of Jesus' Passion ends on a sad note that still lingers and plays on for all those who have ears to hear the sound of grace- -amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.

Was Pilate right about Jesus? Was Pilate right when he said before the crowds "*Look, nothing deserving of death has been done by him*" in Luke 23:15b?

He is partially right; Jesus has done nothing deserving of death before the kingdoms of man; he has not sinned against Rome or Israel's teachers. However, when Jesus lays down his life on the cross, the Father will place the sins of all his people, past, present and future upon Jesus Christ as our Substitutionary Savior.

When Jesus is on the cross receiving the Father's wrath for our sins, he will be dying because he is the sin-bearer who deserves to die before God *for us*. That is, as our substitute, he will bear the penalty that is due us- -he will die in our place- -for our transgressions and God will punish him with the fury of eternal punishment.

So who will it be? Barabbas or Jesus?

At the cross, we are reminded that the perfect righteousness God requires of mankind, God provides in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ for all who repent and believe.

Remember, as the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

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

Thanks be to God for His Word! Thanks be to God for His Christ!

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## Scripture Lesson

<sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 2:10-12:** Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. <sup>11</sup> Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. <sup>12</sup> Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 148:11-13:** Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! <sup>12</sup> Young men and maidens together, old men and children! <sup>13</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Isaiah 40:21-23:** Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? <sup>22</sup> It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; <sup>23</sup> who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Revelation 6:14-16:** The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. <sup>15</sup> Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, <sup>16</sup> calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

**Revelation 19:15-18:** From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. <sup>17</sup> Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, <sup>18</sup> to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great."

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