

Matthew 27:11-14

Introduction

In verse two of chapter twenty-seven we saw that when morning had come, the chief priests and the elders of the people “bound [Jesus] and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.” It had already been decided that Jesus deserved to die, but the death penalty could only be enforced by the Roman governor. So after the interlude of verses three to ten and the story of Judas’ suicide and the buying of the potter’s field, Matthew picks up where he left off in verse two.

I. Matthew 27:11 — Now Jesus stood before the governor...

Can you stop for a moment and picture the scene as though you were actually there, watching? We see Jesus standing bound as an accused criminal (27:2). We see Pilate sitting on his raised platform and judgment seat (27:19). Matthew says it so simply: “Jesus stood before the governor.” But when he wrote those words, I wonder if he was thinking about how strange, and how terrible, and how wonderful they sounded? Jesus, the holy and righteous Son of God, stood before Pilate, a wicked and heartless governor. Jesus, who is God in the flesh, stands before Pilate, His own rebellious creation. “Mark how He that is ordained by His Father to be the Judge of the whole creation, humbled Himself, and was content to stand before the judge of the land of Judaea” (Origen). Only two or three days earlier, Jesus said:

✓ Matthew 25:31–32 — When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. **Before him** will be gathered all the nations.

Before Him *Pilate* will stand. But on this day, we see *Jesus* standing before Pilate. And as we are there, watching, we know that He is standing there *for us*. “He was arraigned that we might be discharged” (Henry). “God’s Son stood trial before a mortal man and suffered accusation and condemnation that we might stand without fear in the presence of God” (Calvin). As we *behold* Jesus standing before Pilate, and know by faith that He was standing there *for us*, how can we not love Him? How can we not want to offer up ourselves *to Him* as living sacrifices? How can we not pour contempt on all our pride? How can we not even be willing to take up our own cross and follow Him? When you see Jesus standing before the governor, do you see Him standing there – for you? Are you *beholding* Him?

II. Matthew 27:11 — Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

Only a Gentile words the question like this. In verse 42 the *Jewish* chief priests will mock Jesus, saying, “He is the king of *Israel*; let Him come down now from the cross.” Only a Gentile says, “king of the *Jews*.” And so we remember that the last time Jesus was referred to as “king of the Jews” was by some Gentiles in Matthew chapter two:

- ✓ Matthew 2:1-2 — Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

The Gentile wise men came to worship Jesus, who was born king of the Jews. But now, thirty years and twenty-five chapters later, Jesus stands before the judgment seat of a Gentile ruler, and the Gentile asks Him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” The emphasis in the Greek is on the word “you.” “Are *you* the king of the Jews?” In verse twenty-nine, the Gentile Roman soldiers will mock Jesus, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And in verse thirty-seven, we find the official “charge” against Jesus: “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” The chief priests and elders of the people have changed their story for Pilate. Instead of blasphemy (a religious crime), now they accuse Jesus of sedition and rebellion against the state (a political crime). They’ve taken Jesus’ claims to be Israel’s Messiah and twisted them and distorted them to mean that Jesus was planning a rebellion against Rome. But this is truly ridiculous. It’s crazy and absurd. We know this. And, of course, Jesus knows this, too.

So what does Jesus have to say in order to get *justice*? If anyone in the history of the world ever had a right to justice, wouldn’t it be Jesus? What does Jesus have to say in order to avoid the gross injustice of the cross? Just a simple “no,” would do. “No, I am not the king of the Jews.” Couldn’t we justify an answer like this because we knew the *kind of political* “king” that Pilate is imagining. Is the *full* truth really so important right now? But Jesus knows that even if it might result in justice for Himself, a simple “no” would still be a betrayal of the truth. So Jesus leaves all matters of justice in the hands of God (1 Peter 2:22-23), and *once again* He testifies the good confession (1 Timothy 6:13; cf. Mat. 26:62-66).

III. Matthew 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.”

Just like his answer to the chief priests and elders (26:64), this is a qualified “yes.” “Yes, I am the king of the Jews. But I don’t mean by that what you mean.” John tells us in his Gospel how Jesus explained to Pilate:

- ✓ John 18:36 — My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.

Pilate may find this interesting, and even convincing, but he’s also very practical.

- ✓ John 18:37a — Then Pilate said to him, “So you are *a king*?”

Once again, the escape route is standing right there in front of Jesus. The door is wide open. It would be so *easy* for Jesus, and make things so much easier for Pilate, if Jesus would just deny all of the charges outright, and without any qualifications. “No, I am not the king of the Jews.” But then Jesus would betray the truth, and He would compromise His *witness* to Pilate. So Jesus answered:

- ✓ John 18:37b — *You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.*

For Matthew, it was sufficient just to report this simple answer of Jesus: “You have said so.” Leaving all matters of justice completely in the hands of God (1 Peter 2:22-23), Jesus testified the good confession (1 Timothy 6:13). Jesus chose to be a faithful witness, even if it meant that He would be unjustly condemned to hang on a cross. Jesus answered Pilate: “You have said so.”

IV. Matthew 27:12 — But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer.

Why is this? If He answered Pilate, why not answer the accusations of the chief priests and elders? Luke tells us what we might have already guessed. They were saying things like this:

- ✓ Luke 23:2, 5 — We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king... He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.

Doesn't it drive you crazy? All of these things are either extremely misleading or else outright lies. Over, and over and over again Jesus is falsely accused and falsely maligned. So where is the *truth*? It seems so simple and easy to see. It seems so obvious. The truth is that these are all *lies*. They're all bold, bald faced lies. So *why* won't Jesus say so? *Why* won't Jesus speak up? He answered Pilate. Why won't He answer the chief priests and the elders?

V. Matthew 27:13 — Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?”

Pilate's asking what we're asking. He's asking for the whole world, what the whole world should learn to ask. “Is Jesus hard of hearing? Is he living in another world? Does he realize that his life is on the line... Isn't it instinctive to fight for your life, especially when attacks are unjust? ‘No one is wont to be silent when his life is at stake.’ Doesn't Jesus sense that he has a sympathetic Roman judge, who cordially despises the religious leaders?” (Bruner; quoting others). So why would Jesus *not* respond? Why would the *accused* give *no answer*? As we imagine ourselves standing their watching, wouldn't we agree that the longer His silence continues, the more deafening it seems to be?

On the one hand, Pilate wonders *why*? But on the other hand, Pilate is trying to get Jesus to talk. Pilate has no love for Jesus' accusers. They were all a thorn in his side. So if it's Jesus' death that makes these people happy, then Pilate would probably like nothing more than to let Jesus go free. But Pilate is not even close to being a man of principle, and recently his patron (sponsor?) had been losing favor with Rome. So at this point, his own position as the governor of Judea was none too secure. Jesus had answered Pilate once, but Pilate wanted more answers, and also simpler and easier answers. If Pilate is going to show up these chief priests and elders, then he must have more from Jesus than what he's gotten so far. He needs Jesus to answer. He needs

Jesus to say something. Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?”

VI. Matthew 27:14 — But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Sometimes I wonder if Pilate was more amazed than we are today. Maybe we don't share quite all of Pilate's amazement because we know *why* Jesus gave him no answer. But isn't that condemning? Shouldn't this cause us to be infinitely *more* amazed than Pilate could have ever been? Pilate was amazed, but that amazement did nothing for him. It didn't move him to believe and to worship. On the other hand, we can hear Matthew's own amazement when he writes: “[Jesus] gave him no answer, *not even to a single charge*.” Matthew was amazed, and we know that his amazement found an outlet, it found an expression in true faith, and worship, and obedience. Why didn't Jesus answer? Why was He silent? Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah wrote (and I believe he wrote in complete and total amazement):

✓ Isaiah 53:7 — 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.

Conclusion

Never has any silence reverberated so loudly throughout all the world. As the reformers of the 16th century reflected on these same verses, they said it very simply: Jesus held his peace when he was accused, so that we may not be accused (cf. Geneva Bible). Jesus held his peace when he was *falsely* accused, so that we, *who were guilty*, might not be accused. Calvin takes it one step further: “Christ therefore was at that time silent, that he may now be our advocate, and by his intercession may deliver us from condemnation.” The holy and righteous one stood mute and silent before Pilate, so that He might stand before His Father today speaking and answering unceasingly on our behalf. Are you ***beholding*** Him, standing before Pilate, surrounded by His accusers – *silent*, giving *no* answer, opening *not* His mouth? And do we know, as we behold Him, that we are the guilty ones, and He is innocent? Can we hear in His *silence* the beautiful, deafening, reverberating, and triumphant proclamation of the Gospel of God's love for guilty sinners like we are? “Amazing love, O what sacrifice, the Son of God giv'n for me; My debt He pays and my death He dies, that I might live, that I might live” (Graham Kendrick).

Once we've had our eyes opened to see the glorious good news of God's love for sinners, then we need an *outlet* to *respond* in obedience and devotion. Can you identify with this? Have you felt this need? In this case, doesn't it seem like the most obvious way to respond is simply by following Jesus' example? One commentator writes: This “is not the silence of defeat or confusion but of a triumphant resolution. Jesus' commitment to the cross—the will of his Father—is firmly fixed. Nothing, no one, can turn Jesus away from that goal.” Oh that we could have the same triumphant resolution – the same commitment to the will of God. Both in the *answer* that He gave to Pilate *and* in His *silence* before Pilate, Jesus was leaving all matters of justice completely and totally in God's hands.

- ✓ 1 Peter 2:22–23 — He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

Jesus' only concern was the will of His Father, and Jesus knew that the will of His Father was that He should suffer and die. And so He opened not His mouth. Oh that we might have the same *triumphant resolution*, the same commitment to the will of God – enough to leave justice in God's hands and to suffer injustice silently, *willingly, without even any protest*, for as long as it should be the will of God. *Whenever* we speak, may our words *never* be motivated by the desire to preserve or gain justice for ourselves. But don't we immediately feel how our words are so often the very opposite of this? – In fact, how our words are *almost always* the very opposite of this? Here in the example of Jesus, we see that our words should only be motivated by the desire to bear faithful witness to God's truth and to His great glory. And if we cannot bear witness to God's truth with our words, then may we be equally as faithful to open not our mouths. The Apostle Peter writes:

- ✓ 1 Peter 4:19 — Therefore let those who suffer *according to God's will* entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

If necessary, are we willing to forego all hopes of justice, and to *share* even in His silence? Not a grudging, bitter, fuming silence – but a silence that faithfully and triumphantly *proclaims and declares* the love of God for sinners.

- ✓ Isaiah 53:7 — 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.