

King Jesus before His Judge

Matthew 27:1-26

Halifax: 17 June 2007

Introduction

This morning we shall pick up again our sermon series in Matthew's gospel.

- We have been away from it for quite some time, so I want to do a little review.
 - As we begin chapter 27 this morning, we find ourselves in the middle of Matthew's account of our Lord's suffering and death.
 - It is here that our Lord Jesus is brought before His Judge, Pontius Pilate.
 - Matthew, like all three of the other gospel writers,
 - gives careful attention to these events pertaining to Jesus' sufferings and death...
 - And no wonder!
 - For God, in His Word, presents the Lord Jesus Christ to us as the One in whom we are to place our absolute trust and confidence...
 - We are to entrust our eternal destiny to Him and to the work that He accomplished for our redemption...
 - And it is in the gospels that we have the divinely inspired record of His death, burial and resurrection given to us.
 - How we need to give diligent consideration to this glorious work.
 - It was in this His suffering that He gave Himself a ransom for us...
 - It was in this that He bore the wrath and curse of God for His people's sins so that they would not have to bear them...
 - The sin is ours, but the suffering is His!
 - For several weeks, I preached to you from Matthew's gospel about the preparations that were made for the sufferings of death of our Lord...
 - we saw
 - how His enemies plotted against Him,
 - how Mary anointed Him for his burial,
 - how Judas stepped forward to betray Him,
 - how Jesus prepared His disciples for his sufferings and death...
 - And at last how Jesus prepared Himself to drink the cup of suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane.

- But now as we move along in Matthew, we come to see Him actually experiencing those sufferings...
 - No longer is there a mere preparation—the hour darkness has now come.
 - Already we have seen:
 - King Jesus before His Arrestors
 - King Jesus before His Accusers
 - Today we come to see
 - King Jesus before His Judge—that is, Pontius Pilate.
 - Pilate is the Roman governor or prefect who governed Judea in the days of Christ...
 - and it was necessary that the Jews bring anyone worthy of capital punishment to him...
 - This was necessary because God had taken away their authority to execute anyone,
 - having placed them under Roman rule as a chastisement.
 - But consider what a remarkable thing this is!
 - The Holy Son of God to whom all judgement has been entrusted—standing trial as a malefactor before a lowly Roman governor,
 - a mere prefect who was himself under the authority of the governor of Syria who was under Tiberius, the Roman Emperor.
 - As absurd as this may seem,
 - it was a part of the suffering that our Lord had to bear in order that we might be redeemed.
 - In is a thing most amazing that the Son of God should undergo such humiliation for our sake—
 - that He would even allow Himself to be judged by this vacillating Roman Prefect and sentenced to crucifixion by him!
 - The glorious Son of God condemned by a Roman governor whose name most of us would not know but for this one act.
 - What amazing love this is!

TRANS> As we come now to look at this account of our Lord's judgement in this world,

- I want you to see that...

I. Matthew draws attention to the fact that Jesus is found to be completely innocent.

- Oddly enough, He is still sentenced to be crucified... but still, He is found innocent.

A. See here...

1. Even Judas himself testifies to the innocence of Jesus...

- a. In verses 3-5, we find him full of remorse for betraying Him, and in verse 4 he explains why:

- "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."
- Judas, of all people, knew good and well that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death...
 - He did not want to follow him any more,
 - but he knew that Jesus was an honest and upright man...
 - And so it was that when he saw him condemned by the Sanhedrin and dragged off in chains to Pilate to be crucified,
 - he hardly knew what to think of it all!
 - The horrible injustice of what he had done overwhelmed him!
- He had meant to breaking his ties with Jesus and to make a little profit in the process,
 - but he did not think Jesus would really allow himself to be crucified...
 - He knew that Jesus was innocent and he knew the miracles that HE was able to perform and how many times He had slipped away from His enemies...
 - But now he is black and blue, covered with spitting and reproach and dragged away bound to stand before Pilate!

TRANS> It was all so unjust—even to Judas...

- b. Even to Judas who had good reason to find fault with Jesus if he could...

- 1) You know how you are motivated to justify your action when you reject someone—

- when you leave a church or when you get a divorce...
 - but the problem was,
 - though he had spent three years in close fellowship with Jesus,
 - he could find no solid grounds for rejecting Him...

- 2) He did not want to follow Him, but it was not because Jesus had done anything worthy of death—or even worthy of a beating...
 - It was just that Judas was not satisfied with what he was getting from Christ.
 - He declares with his own lips that Jesus is innocent...

TRANS> And this declaration of innocence from a disgruntled, betraying disciple who had lived with Him for several years is a striking testimony indeed.

2. Then there is Pilate himself who also declares the innocence of Jesus.
 - a. As governor, it is his responsibility to examine the Lord and sentence Him...
 - But when the Sanhedrin bring Jesus to him,
 - he is surprised at the charges they bring!
 - They accuse Him of claiming to a king—a rival to Caesar!
 - b. Matthew does not give us as many details as the other gospels, so we will not bother with these either...
 - But he records Pilate’s question which is common to all four of the gospels...
 - “Are **You** the King of the Jews?”
 - In all four gospels the word “you” is emphatic...
 - “**You**—Are *You* the King of the Jews?”
 - Is that the best Jesus’ accusers could come up with?
 - This man with no riches, no army, no riotous speeches...a rival to Caesar?
 - How could they accuse **Him** of sedition and treason?
 - What’s more,
 - Pilate knew very well that Jesus accusers had no love for Caesar!
 - The last thing they were concerned about was the protection of Roman rule!
 - c. It becomes clear to him that Jesus is innocent.
 - Pilate begins to look for ways to release Him...
- 1) In a very shrewd manoeuvre, Pilate tries to play the now assembled crowd against the Sanhedrin...
 - He knows that Jesus has been popular with the crowds,

- so he reminds them of the custom at the Passover or setting one prisoner free—
 - and he asks them if they want him to release Jesus.
 - And to make the outcome more certain
 - He offers a notorious murderer named Barabbas as the other choice.
 - Pilate was not dummy...
 - The last thing he wanted to do was execute a man to please the Sanhedrin if it was going to cause an uproar of protest from the multitude...
 - By offering to release Jesus, he is able to remove himself from the difficulty.
 - But to his surprise, this crowd chooses Barabbas to be released!
 - This crowd is probably not the same one who had welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem only a few days before with their Hosannas...
 - something Pilate likely knew about...
 - These are probably Jerusalem Jews rather than Galilean Jews, and they call for his crucifixion.
- 2) But the Lord uses the crowd's rejection of Jesus to bring out His innocence all the more!
- to highlight further the fact that they want Him crucified even though they know He is innocent!
- a) Their choosing of Barabbas causes Pilate to question them as to why they want Jesus to be crucified, saying
- "Why, what evil has he done?"
 - Contained in this question is Pilate's own conviction that he can find no fault in Him!
 - When had He spoken against Caesar?
 - When had He caused a riot or disturbed the public peace?
 - When had He who went about doing good defrauded anyone?
- b) And the crowd responds in a way that further points to Jesus' innocence.
- Instead of stating whatever He has done, they only shout louder their demand that He be crucified...
 - They show that they don't have any clear accusation to make!
 - What is lacking in evidence, they try to make up in clamour.

- 3) And then, on top of all this, there is Pilate's wife who in God's providence is given a dream,
 - a dream so troubling that she interrupts her husband to insist that he leave Jesus alone!
 - She says to Pilate,
 - "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him.
 - Tradition has it that this woman became a disciple of Christ, and the Eastern Church has canonised her as a saint.
 - Whether she was a disciple or not,
 - Matthew has recorded her testimony for all to hear to show that that Jesus was a righteous man.

- 4) And all this testimony together causes Pilate to make yet a further declaration that he does not regard Jesus to be worthy of death...
 - So strong a one that he washes his hands so as to say,
 - I am not sentencing this man because of any fault I find in Him, but only at the request of these who are so firmly convinced that He must die...

TRANS> So you see all the emphasis on the innocence of Jesus in this Matthew's account...

- There is the testimony of Judas who had been so near to Him.
 - There is the evidence from the obviously trumped up charges of the Sanhedrin.
 - There is the inability of the multitude to say why Jesus should be crucified.
 - There is the dream of Pilate's wife.
 - There is the testimony of Pilate that he is only doing this because of the Jew's instigation, not because he can find anything wrong with Him.
3. With these testimonies, Matthew is emphasising the innocence of Jesus that has already been presented in this gospel...
 - a. At His baptism, the Father's voice from heaven was heard to say:
 - Matthew 3:17: This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.
 - God the Father would never have said such a thing of one who was worthy of death!

 - b. And again, at the transfiguration, we are told that:

- Matthew 17:5: “a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

TRANS> The testimony of Jesus innocence in Matthew 27 only emphasises what has already been proven and brings it to our attention at the time of Jesus death...

B. It is very important for all of you to recognise and confess the innocence of Jesus...

1. There are many today who deny that Jesus was without sin.
 - a. In fact, a survey taken a few years ago found that the vast majority of protestant leaders do not believe that Jesus was without sin.
 - b. They argue that because He was fully human, that means that He must have also been sinful...
 - They seem to forget that He was not only human, but also divine—one person with two natures—and that as God He cannot sin...
 - They also forget that sin is not part of the constitution of a human being...
 - Sin is the corruption of human nature that passed upon the whole human race through Adam’s transgression.
 - What we are so familiar with since the fall is not human nature, but human nature corrupted.
 - Jesus alone was the model man—man without corruption.
2. But what difference does it really make if we do not believe that Jesus was free from all sin?
 - a. First, if Jesus was not completely free from sin, there can be no hope of forgiveness.
 - 1) The Epistle to the Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus was able to offer Himself as an acceptable sacrifice for our sins only because He Himself was without sin...
 - 2) If He had to deal with His own sins, He could not have made atonement for ours.
 - 3) His death, despite His innocence, shows that He died in the place of others as the Bible everywhere teaches.
 - b. Second, if Jesus was not completely free from sin, there can be no hope of heaven for us.
 - 1) Not only because we could not be forgiven,
 - but also because heaven, as it is described in scripture—

- is a world without sin where we live in perfect righteousness before God.
 - That is what makes heaven heaven!
 - At last we will be done with all our selfishness and snarliness and we will live in perfect love!
- 2) But if sin is just a part of what it is to be human and Jesus, being human, was also sinful,
- then what hope is there that we could ever be raised up out of our corruption!
 - It would mean that we were doomed to live the way we live now for ever and ever!
 - What a dreadful thought—to never be free of sin!
- c. Third, if Jesus was not completely free from sin, he cannot be worshipped and honoured as the Son of God.
- 1) As God, He is holy and cannot sin.
- Those who claim that He sinned cannot believe that He is really God...
 - at least not God as God really is—
 - a being of infinite perfection and purity and without defect...
- 2) If Jesus was sinful, then we are wrong to worship Him.
- He is not then the Son of God but a very wicked and evil man...
 - Wicked and evil because He falsely claimed that He was the Son of God when He was not...
 - Wicked and evil because He promised to redeem us from sin when He Himself was not even free of it.

TRANS> But you see, Jesus **was** without sin,

- and Matthew has highlighted this fact in His account of the hour when Christ was judged.

II. This being so, it is for you to fully affirm Him as Lord and Saviour.

A. There is no other way to live consistently with Him...

1. There is no fence sitting—you have to go one way or the other...
 - a. Either Jesus was a perfect man or He was a very wretched man...

- b. Either His claim that He was the Son of God who was sent from heaven to save sinners is true you must entrust your eternal destiny to Him...
 - or He is a man who falsely claimed all these things and it is your duty to oppose Him and to utterly reject Him as one of the worst men who ever lived.
 - c. C.S. Lewis once said that He is either Lord, Liar, or Lunatic...
 - There is no other possibility for someone who claims to be the Son of God.
2. You run into a thousand contradictions if you join the many thousands who affirm that He is a good man...
- but who never embrace Him fully as their Lord and Saviour.
 - You need to understand that if you do that, you will at last be forced to utterly repudiate Him.
 - Either respond to Him as the Son of God...
 - or know that you are His mortal enemy—just like Judas and Pilate.
- B. Judas and Pilate both testified that Jesus was innocent,
- but as neither lived consistently with that claim by fully embracing Him as Lord and Saviour,
 - both were forced to completely reject Him.
 - See how this was so...
1. First, let's take a look at Judas.
- a. Judas believed that Jesus was innocent, but it seems that he was disappointed with Jesus.
 - Jesus had not been nearly what Judas had expected Him to be when He came to be His follower.
- 1) You know what the Jews were expecting!
- A Messiah who would drive out the Romans and become the undisputed ruler of the world...
 - A Messiah who would bring unprecedented prosperity to Israel...
 - A Messiah who would receive highest honours and acclaim from the nations of the world and who would share those honours with His servants....
 - And Judas has the opportunity to be one of the original twelve!

- 2) But as the days dragged on, Judas (and the other eleven disciples) saw very little substantive change...
- They saw a man who was able to work miracles and answer all His detractors with ease...
 - They saw a man who was pure and holy and who never even spoke one word that was out of place...
 - They heard a man whose teaching got right to their hearts...
 - But instead of riches and prosperity, they saw poverty...
 - Instead of popularity and esteem, they saw rejection and reproach...
 - Instead of increasing dominion, they saw increasing opposition from those in authority.

3) Every disciple of Jesus experiences this kind of disappointment...

- We are excited about Him and His kingdom and His promises and we want to see them in tangible ways sooner rather than later!
 - We want to see the kingdom moving forward!
 - We want to see the world turning to Jesus with fervency—and we should want that!
 - We want to see God’s blessing on our churches and our families.
 - We want to see His grace making a huge difference in our own lives so that we are full of wisdom and holiness...
 - And we rightly yearn for these things and pray for these things, but sometimes we don’t see a lot...
 - Sometimes we see loved ones we have prayed for die without Christ...
 - And we struggle on, wondering where the power and the grace have gone.
 - There is a kind of disappointment that every disciple faces in this world.

b. And this disappointment puts your faith to the test...

- It exposes the character of your faith...

1) There are two kinds of faith—a temporary faith and a persevering faith.

- a) Disappointment concerning Jesus revealed that Judas had a temporary faith...

- When he did not get what he was looking for in this world from Jesus, he gave up on him...
 - He knew good and well that Jesus was a good man and that He was full of miracles and grace...
 - but he could not trust Him to establish His kingdom when that kingdom did not take the form he (Judas) expected it to take.
- He did not come to Jesus to suffer with Him and to bear reproach with Him.
 - He came to be delivered from suffering and reproach, and Jesus had let him down...
 - He would have no more of it—
 - He felt that he had been betrayed, so he betrayed Jesus...
 - Yet, he knew that Jesus really was a good man!
 - It was a terrible contradiction.
- You see how all this brought Judas to utter despair...
 - He pretty much knew that Jesus was the Messiah, but he did not like what the Messiah had to offer!
 - He was torn apart from within!
 - He felt there was no hope for him...
 - And when He saw Jesus actually being dragged off to Pilate,
 - He could bear no more...
 - He hated Jesus but he knew he had no reason to hate him.
 - And so he goes and confesses his wrong to the Sanhedrin and casts away the thirty pieces of silver and hangs himself.
 - He could not see beyond the cross and the reproach.
 - He did not have hope because He did not have faith that somehow Christ would yet establish His glorious kingdom of righteousness...

TRANS> His faith did not last because it was temporary faith.

- b) The difference in those who have persevering faith is that their faith never fails...
- It is not that they are never disappointed.
 - It is rather that they never at last give up on Christ.

- Unlike Judas, they have unreservedly entrusted themselves to Him and are looking to Him to work everything out.
 - They trust Jesus even when they can't make sense out of what He is doing...
 - They run away when He is arrested,
 - they may even deny Him...
 - but within they still have a glimmer of hope to wait on Him and to see what will come of it...
 - They know that He will do what needs to be done and that His kingdom will come and His promises will all be brought to fulfillment.
 - Their trust is in Him and they stick with Him to the end...
 - They waver indeed, but they can never utterly renounce Him.
- The difference in them is that Christ has given them His Spirit to cause them to savingly embrace Him...
 - By the Spirit working through the Word,
 - they have seen that there is no hope in themselves...
 - By the Spirit working through the Word,
 - they have seen that Jesus is the only Saviour who can take away sin and reconcile them to God...
 - By the Spirit working through the Word,
 - they have embraced Him with faith and rejoice in the forgiveness of sin and in the hope of heaven.
 - And the Spirit keeps them through the hard times so that though they can be very discouraged at times,
 - they cannot give up on Christ.

2) And so I admonish you today to commit yourself wholly to Christ!

- He is the Son of God!
 - Yes, you must go through much tribulation—but take heart!
 - You have a Saviour who has gone before you and He will bring you into His glorious kingdom...

- You have need of patience so that after you have done the will of God, you may inherit heaven.
- If you are tentative about Christ, and hesitate to wholly entrust yourself to Him,
 - You are on the road to despair...
 - You will end up in the same place as Judas...
 - If Jesus is indeed the Son of God who came from heaven to save sinners,
 - you must deal with Him as such!

2. Now let's take a look at Pilate.

- a. To Pilate it was given to pass judgement upon the very Son of God.
 - As I pointed out in the introduction,
 - It is an amazing thing that the Son of God who is the final judge of all should allow himself to be judged by a third rate Roman ruler!
 - But there is a very real sense that until the last day,
 - it is given to all of us to pass judgement on Jesus—
 - one way or the other...
 - As Pilate learned, there can be no compromise...
 - Either you unite with Him or you unite with those who call for His crucifixion.
- b. Pilate was not a disciple of Jesus, but having been called upon to examine Him, he concluded that Jesus was a good man (as we have already seen)...
 - 1) He knew that Jesus was innocent,
 - but he would not act according to what he knew!
 - He was more concerned about his position than he was about doing what was right and just.
 - It was clearly his responsibility in his position to set free an innocent man who had been falsely accused...
 - But Pilate was concerned that a riot would begin if he refused to crucify Jesus, so he agrees to do it!
 - He was concerned that he might jeopardise his place as governor if there was a tumult among the people...
 - *Oh Pilate Pilate Pilate!*

- *How trivial your position as government that you were so eager to safeguard must seem to you now!*
- *Like Esau, you sold yourself out for mess of pottage!*
- How small important men look before the throne of the living God!
- What a wicked Judgement Pilate passes against the Lord—
 - He knew it was wrong,
 - See how he vainly tries to wash his hands!
 - But he was blinded to see just how wrong—
 - He knows now, and how deep is his regret.

2) There are so many like Pilate!

a) So many who will not follow Christ because they are afraid of what they will lose in this world...

- My husband won't like it if I try to keep the Sabbath...
- I might lose my job if I tell the truth...
- People might make fun of me if I wear modest clothing...
- But I can't make ends meet if I tithe...
- People will walk all over me if I show too much kindness to them...
- I know that this is right, but I have to do what is best for my family...

b) But you see where this kind of thinking led Pilate...

- He knew Christ was innocent,
 - but because he refused to commit himself fully to what was right concerning him,
 - he ended up delivering him up to be crucified!
- He tried so hard to stay neutral.
 - He tried to get the crowd to call for Christ to be set free...
 - He tried to talk them out of it...
 - He tried to wash his hands and shift the responsibility over to them...
 - But he was the judge and at the end of the day, it was his decision and he chose to have Jesus crucified.

- c. You all must decide for yourselves about Christ.
 - You cannot at last be neutral about Him—you can only pretend to be so.
 - Either you confess Him as God and Saviour and you treat Him as such...
 - or you set yourself to be His enemy.
 - If He is God and Saviour, ignoring Him or leaving Him to others is to repudiate His majesty...
 - His a claim upon your unreserved trust and obedience because He is God.

Conclusion

So what **is** your judgement concerning Him?

- Is He the Son of God, or is He not?
- Is He good or is He evil?
- Is He trustworthy, or is He a deceiver?

Come on now,

- Cast your lot in with Him.
- Give your whole life to Him and He will care for you.
- Trust in Him without reservation and you will not be disappointed at the end.

The Jewish multitude rejected Him for the same reason Judas did...

- He was supposed to be the Messiah, but as Messiah, He had let them down—
 - He had not done what they wanted.
- And so when Pilate tried to roll the responsibility for his death over on them,
 - They gladly took it and spoke the terrible words:
 - “His blood be on us and on our children!”
- And little did they know that thus it was to be in every case!
 - Either His blood was sprinkled on them and their children to make atonement...
 - or His blood was charged to them and their children to condemn them...
 - These are the only two choices.
 - You can't wash your hands of this...
 - Either acknowledge Him as Lord of all and wholly entrust yourself to Him—

- or bear all the guilt that will come upon you for rejecting Him and for counting His blood to be of no account.
- He is the Son of God and thus it must be!
- Oh how good it is to have His cleansing blood upon you!
 - When you are cleansed by it,
 - it keeps you from the despair of Judas because puts you in your right mind about Christ—
 - so that you see how marvellous He is and good and faithful His promises are—even in the hardest times...
 - And likewise,
 - it keeps you from the confusion of Pilate because it causes you to see how much better Christ is than any position or any opportunity you may have in this world.
 - It opens your eyes to see what you have in Him and to rejoice in Him so that you cannot forsake Him for all the world.
 - You see His glory,
 - the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth—
 - and so you hold fast to Him with a joy that overcomes the world.