

## The Trial Of Jesus

### Part 5

#### **“His blood *be* on us and on our children.”**

Text: Matt 27:15-26

Suggested Hymns:

49, 55, 327, 85, 61

1) Jesus is returned to Pilate

2) The wife of Pilate sends a warning to him

3) The curse

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 27:15-26, <sup>15</sup> *Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished.* <sup>16</sup> *And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.* <sup>17</sup> *Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?”* <sup>18</sup> *For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.*

<sup>19</sup> *While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, “Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him.”* <sup>20</sup> *But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.* <sup>21</sup> *The governor answered and said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” They said, “Barabbas!”* <sup>22</sup> *Pilate said to them, “What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said to him, “Let Him be crucified!”*

<sup>23</sup> *Then the governor said, “Why, what evil has He done?” But they cried out all the more, saying, “Let Him be crucified!”* <sup>24</sup> *When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.”* <sup>25</sup> *And all the people answered and said, “His blood be on us and on our children.”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The pertinent words for today are the words spoken by the Jews, *“His blood be on us and on our children.”* May the Lord bless our meditation.

### 1. Jesus Is Returned To Pilate

Pilate’s hope in disposing of the case of Jesus by sending Jesus to Herod was in vain. Before long the Prisoner was brought back to the judgment-hall.

Herod treated Jesus with shameless disdain, while Pilate still treated Him with some respect. Yet Pilate could plainly see that the verdict of Herod agreed with his own, namely, that whatever views might be held as to the teaching and person of the Galilean Prophet, He at least was not guilty of death.

This point was now definitely established by Pilate’s own observation and confirmed by expert advice, for as such, naturally, the action of Herod, as coming from a native prince, would be interpreted. There was now for Pilate absolutely no excuse for a delay of favourable action.

But what did Pilate do? He still followed the policy of all weaklings, that miserable policy of stalling for time. When the fate of Jesus was once more placed into his unhappy hands, he called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people for the purpose of making an important announcement, always hoping that something, even though he did not know what, might turn up.

At last Pilate begins his speech. You have brought me this man as one that is perverting the nation. I have examined Him before you and have found in Him no fault at all. Then I sent Him to Herod. Herod examined Him. And the result is the same.

And therefore, he continues, still thinking hard, therefore — what? And therefore, you would expect him to say, I am going to release Him, and I warn you by the power of Rome and the terrible anger of Tiberius not so much as to disturb a hair on His head. But instead Pilate offers a proposition contrary to all logic and justice, <sup>16</sup> *“I will therefore chastise Him and release Him.”*<sup>1</sup>

Was a more unjust proposal ever made? Certainly not! Inflict a cruel punishment, as a sop to their rage, and then release Him, as a tribute to justice! And yet this proposal was thoroughly characteristic of the man who made it, as well as of the system which he represented.

The spirit of imperial Rome was always the spirit of compromise in order to gain the ultimate end. And nine times out of ten it worked.

Scores of officials throughout the empire were successfully conducting their administration along these very lines. But to Pilate fell the sad distinction of applying the corrupt system to an altogether unexpected exception to the rule.

In proposing to have Jesus chastised although innocent, Pilate cut himself loose from all principles of justice. But he hoped thus to guide his course safely to the point at which he aimed. In this Pilate was fatally mistaken. The impulse of his own false beginning could only end in his own wreck and ruin.

## **2. The Wife Of Pilate Sends A Warning To Him**

Only by means of right you can achieve right. You cannot do one thing wrong in the hope of making another thing right. It cannot be done. Not that Pilate did not know better. Nor that he was unwarned.

It was about this time that a distinct warning came to him from his loving wife. She sent to tell her husband of a painful dream she had just had about the prisoner and to warn him, not as governor, but as her husband, not to have anything to do with that just man.

And how did she know about Jesus? That is not stated. But we must remember that Jesus was nationally known, and no doubt He had been the subject of conversation in the palace. On the evening before, a Roman guard had been given to assist in His arrest. The matter was probably mentioned. And with the thought of Jesus she went to sleep.

Now, we are not going to talk about dreams. Many people are deceived by them. But God can make use of a dream. He has done that, and we can be assured that the hand of God was in this dream and that in the message both the hand of God and of a loving wife were outstretched to save Pilate from a doom to which he hastened.

Pilate, who as an educated Roman would have remembered Caesar's death and Calpurnia's dream, must have been impressed. Gladly he would have yielded and gratified both his nobler finer feeling and innate sense of justice, if it only would not have been for that secret streak of cowardice.

And it seems that in the eager pursuit of temporising measures there was opened another avenue of hoped-for escape.

Up to this point the actors assembled on the stage of Christ's trial were still comparatively few as compared with the masses that now appeared on the scene. And it was just with this mob of Jerusalem as against the leaders with whom he had been dealing that Pilate hoped to find rescue. His knowledge that it was for envy that Jesus had been delivered to him by the leaders he hoped to turn to account.

It was the custom of the Roman governors as a contribution to the Passover joy to release a prisoner to the people whom they wanted. There were generally plenty of political prisoners on hand, rebels against the detested power of Rome, and for that reason popular heroes. And for once the annual demand to have a prisoner released was welcome to Pilate.

Here was the plan. He would give them the choice between a robber and leader of sedition, who in a late uprising had committed murder, namely Barabbas, and Jesus, who had a few days before been the hero of a popular demonstration riding into Jerusalem. As an aspirant to Messiahship, he imagined, Jesus would be the very person they should choose to be released.

It seemed to be a good plan. Why should it not work? Pilate at least thought that he could not go wrong. And still, taking into consideration the person and the issue, failure is the only outcome in which this plan could result.

Only by means of right you can achieve right. You cannot do one thing wrong for the purpose of making another thing right. You cannot gamble in the interest of justice. It cannot be done.

It was an utterly unjust thing for Pilate to do, because the proposal treated Jesus as if He was guilty and already condemned, which was not the case. And furthermore it staked the life of an innocent man upon the voice of the people, in the hope that the voice of the people, is the voice of God, which is not always the case.

There was a brief interval, which was put to good use by the priests and elders. Since Pilate had appealed to the mob, they, too, would appeal to the mob. And they knew their mob better than Pilate. They persuaded and moved the people. All they had to do was to use a simple political trick as old as politics,

that is, pass the word around as to which of the two was Pilate's choice. And then, as far as the mob was concerned, the matter was settled.

Picture to yourselves the scene. The holy, undefiled, sinless Son of God standing with a scowling thug on that high tribunal! Words fail to describe the contrast: on the one side the King of Glory, on the other the minion of hell!

For the Holy, the Harmless, for Jesus whom thousands of hosannas had greeted five days before, not a word of pity is heard. And then, as the choice is made which is to decide the fate of the Redeemer and forever confirm the tragic truth of the natural depravity of the human heart, a thousand, ten thousand hands are pointed, and ten thousand voices raise the cry "*Barabbas!*"

And so, in spite of all manipulations, the matter had come to the worst. After a last brief moment of hopeful suspense the choice of Barabbas must have been a staggering blow to Pilate. He had staked all on the choice and lost.

"*What,*" he asked, "*What then shall I do with Jesus?*" This is a question which every believer asks and answers. Probably Pilate had hoped for the answer "Give us Him, too." And how willingly he would have complied with the request!

### 3. The Curse

"*What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?*" Quick as an echo the answer was flashed back: "*Let Him be crucified!*" As with wild vehemence the hideous yells rent the air, Pilate was made aware that the accusers were in deadly earnest in their cry for blood.

What Pilate had considered a loophole for escape was a noose into which he had thrust his neck. He was lost. There was no use for him to plead any more.

When he saw that he could prevail nothing, he did a most silly and hypocritical thing. Calling for a basin of water, he washed his hands before them all and said, "*I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.*"

It was a most impressive act, and yet a solemn farce. Blood and guilt is not washed off so easily. And Pilate's hands were covered with blood.

Instead of washing his hands, he ought to have used them. He ought to have opposed the popular will at whatever risk. He ought to have refused to do the deed of which he himself disapproved.

And so we could go on: I ought to have done this and I ought to have done that. That is how the prisoner whiles away unmolested moments behind the iron bars: I ought to have done this; I ought to have done that. But in back of the case against Jesus was the saving will of God.

Pilate, the coward that he was, was afraid of guilt. But the people were not. His pitiful plea for mercy for Jesus — for that is what it was — is met with a hideous howl of hell. ***“His blood be on us and on our children.”*** Madder cries were never uttered, and profaner curses were never heard, and remembered, too,— with vengeance.

And still, yes, His blood be upon us and on our children, but in another way. ***The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.***<sup>2</sup>

We confess with Luther, as written in *Luther’s Small Catechism*, I believe in **Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate.**

At great cost He has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. ...- not with silver or gold, but with His holy and precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress,  
Wherein before my God I’ll stand  
When I shall reach the heav’nly land. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 23:16

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 1:7