

The night before this passage took place the religious rulers had arrested Jesus and interrogated Him while the public was celebrating Passover with their families. At the crack of dawn, the official verdict of blasphemy was rendered against Jesus. Did they realize that they were the ones who were blaspheming? Historical accounts verify that at that particular time the Jewish rulers could not legally execute a person (John 18:31ⁱ). They had to go through Roman authority. This was fine with them in this case as crucifixion would indicate that Jesus was cursed (Galatians 3:13ⁱⁱ). They did not understand that He was willing to be cursed by bearing their sins and ours. I wonder if they had known it if they would have gone ahead anyway to maintain their power and privileges.

¹ *Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate.* Luke 23:1 The Sanhedrin, chief priests, and scribes who wanted to be sure Jesus was stopped went together to bring accusations against Jesus before Pilate. No wonder that particular crowd of people shouted to have Jesus crucified. History tells us that Pilate was ruthless, but he had recently found his position to be tenuous. His sponsor in Rome, Sejanus, had been executed for treason. Pilate started his workdays quite early. This probably took place between six and seven a.m. How telling that these religious leaders would use the secular powers to do their dirty work! Perhaps that is one reason the Apostle Paul tells us not to go to court against a brother or sister in Christ (1 Corinthians 6:1ⁱⁱⁱ).

² *And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king."* Luke 23:2 They made three charges. The first two were lies. They were the ones misleading the nation. Isn't strange how those who are in darkness always accuse others of what they themselves are guilty? Is it because the guilt weighed on their minds, or were they so blind they could they not even see it?

Regarding not paying tribute, Jesus had told people to give to Caesar what belonged to Caesar (Luke 20:25^{iv}). Only the last charge was true, for He implied He is the Messiah King from Scripture and affirmed that He is the Son of God when they demanded He answer (Luke 22:70^v). But His kind of kingship was not at all one that threatened Rome. He told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36^{vi})."

The zealots encouraged people not to pay taxes. They wanted an earthly kingdom that would oust Rome, but that was not what Jesus was doing. Jesus was not the kind of king the zealots were seeking and certainly not one the religious leaders were seeking. He is the king of humble hearts longing for genuine love. He is the king of the broken and downtrodden. But that threatened the leaders' priorities of position and possessions.

³ *And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so."* ⁴ *Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man."* Luke 23:3,4 "You have said so" was in the language of that day an answer in the affirmative (Mark 14:62^{vii}). Jesus did not deny He was the King of the Jews. He could have answered, as He did during His ministry, in terms that were truthful but unclear (John 10:35,36^{viii}), but He knew it was time for Him to go to the cross. His teaching ministry was over. Now He had to do what He came into this world to do.

If Jesus was a thorn in the side of the Sanhedrin, Pilate may have wanted Him to continue tormenting them. Surely Pilate's spies had listened to Jesus and found that He was not promoting insurrection. This was Pilate's first attempt to release Jesus.

Jesus is the King of the Jews, but He is also the King of all who have been grafted into the Jewish roots through faith in Him (Romans 11:24^{ix}). When we identify ourselves with Him who was born a Jew, we become one with our Jewish brother and sisters who are in Christ (Ephesians 2:14^x). He becomes our King. And so, as His subjects, we should be obeying our King's instructions to love one another and to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:30,31^{xi}).

⁵ But they were urgent, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place." Luke 23:5 He did stir up the people, but the insinuation is that He stirs them up against Rome. People can tell the truth but imply bad motives. Jesus stirred the public up to love God and enter the kingdom of God. He stirred them up to understand the corruption of the priesthood and temple. **May His Spirit continue to stir us up to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.** We need the words of Jesus to stir us out of our complacency and our love for the things of this world! Amen? That is why we need to read the Gospels and the rest of God's Word. The Word reminds us of what is lasting and what is passing (1 John 2:17^{xii}).

⁶ When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. ⁷ And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. Luke 23:6,7 Pilate probably had heard that Jesus was from Galilee, and the accusers just said He stirs up people in Galilee, which gave him a reason to ask if He was from Herod's jurisdiction. That would give Pilate an opportunity to avoid having to deal with the situation. Executing a prophet could cause turmoil and Pilate did not need bad news resulting from his leadership getting back to Rome.

⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. ⁹ So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Luke 23:8-10 Herod was happy about the turn of events because he had wanted to see Jesus do one of the miracles he had heard about. Like his father before him, he had a curiosity about the mystical. Herod questioned Jesus, but Jesus would not give him the honor of replying. Herod had beheaded Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist (Matthew 14:6-9^{xiii}).

The chief priests and scribes made wild accusations against Jesus, but Jesus remained silent. None of the questions were worthy of a response. None of the questions came from a contrite and reverent heart. If they did Jesus would have gladly answered (Isaiah 66:2^{xiv}). Jesus' words made the universe, why would he favor these prideful, irreverent egos with the gracious words that come from His lips? **Divine communion is for the humbly reverent worshiper.** Jesus' silence fulfilled Isaiah's prediction of being silent before His accusers (Isaiah 53:7^{xv}).

We should learn from Jesus that some questions do not need a response. We are often quick with a come-back to insulting comments or questions. That only brings us down to their level (Proverbs 26:4^{xvi}). Jesus knew who He is. Their questions did not threaten Him. He had no need for them to have a favorable opinion of Him. He is in the hands of His almighty Father, and so are we if we are in Christ. Do you know who you

are in Him? How should that affect our responses to those who treat us rudely (Matthew 5:39^{xvii})?

¹¹ *And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate.* ¹² *And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.* Luke 23:11,12 The palace guards had abused Jesus, and now Herod's soldiers did the same. With mocking contempt, they put a royal robe on Him and sent Him back to Pilate. Herod did not want to cause an uprising either. He held the same contempt for the Sanhedrin that Pilate had, even if they both had to work with them. Common enemies can make unlikely friends. They both saw Jesus as innocent. They had been at odds before, but sharing the same problem and sentiments brought them together.

¹³ *Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people,* ¹⁴ *and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him.* ¹⁵ *Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him.* ¹⁶ *I will therefore punish and release him."* Luke 23:13-16 Pilate tried again to release Jesus. Pilate's wife warned him that she had seen in a dream that Jesus was a righteous man (Matthew 27:19^{xviii}). In Greek and Roman mythology, gods came to earth as men and would punish those who mistreated them while granting favors to those who were kind. Perhaps this was on Pilate's mind. Pilate again declared Jesus innocent and said Herod agreed.

Verse 17 is left out of newer translations as it was not found in older manuscripts. It was added here in later ones and in one manuscript after verse 19. Panin agrees that verse 17 was added later as it does not fit with Bible numerics. That verse was an explanation that Pilate's custom was to release a prisoner on Passover. A scribe may have added it later to explain why the following took place.

¹⁸ *But they all cried out together, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas"—* ¹⁹ *a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder.* Luke 23:18,19 The crowd of elders, chief priests, scribes and now some of the public (see verse 13) asked that Jesus be crucified, and that Barabbas be released (Luke 22:66^{xix}). Barabbas was held for insurrection and murder. That makes me think he may have killed a tax collector or Roman paymaster and taken the money. That was an unusual request, for the priests also did not want insurrection. It showed that they thought Jesus to be a greater threat to their power than a real insurgent. Interestingly, Barabbas means son of the father, and Jesus is *the* Son of *the* Father (Proverbs 30:4^{xx}).

²⁰ *Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus,* ²¹ *but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!"* ²² *A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him."* ²³ *But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed.* Luke 23:20-23 Pilate tried again to release Jesus, but the crowd of religious leaders and their supporters demanded crucifixion. Pilate asked again what evil Jesus had done to deserve death and suggested a different form of punishment. Punishment in this case meant scourging with whips studded with glass and lead. It was also called "half death" because it brought the victims so close to dying. Rome believed that under torture people would finally tell the truth. Under torture people will say almost anything to escape the pain, but Jesus was silent. Thinking that this humiliation would

satisfy the leaders, Pilate showed them Jesus' torn body and told them to look at Him in His humiliation.

He tried again to stop short of execution (John 19:5^{xxi}). A broken prophet would surely not be a threat any longer. Between verse 22 and 23 must have been when Jesus was severely flogged. It was then Pilate presented Jesus to them torn and bloody, hoping that would satisfy them. It did not. The shouts of the crowd for crucifixion prevailed.

Who is in this crowd demanding Jesus be crucified? Verse one of this chapter tells us it is the whole crowd that were there at the early morning mock trial. That would be chief priests, the Sanhedrin, some of the temple guards, and verse ten tells us that scribes/lawyers were also there. Any friends of the High Priest family may have also been with them. It is a crowd of over a hundred. All of them felt their positions and income were threatened by the public's acceptance of Jesus and by the things He said that exposed their corruption. I think Pilate understood this, but he had to work with them for they had the authority of Rome to judge Jews in everything but crimes against Rome. He did not need any accusations against him getting back to Rome. The chief priests probably knew that Pilate's problems with Rome would give them the upper hand to have Jesus crucified.

Consider all the details that came together for the prophecies to be fulfilled. There were only a few years when Jewish rulers could not execute a person. Pilate normally got away with doing things his way, but with Sejanus executed he was forced to compromise. Since Rome would carry out the execution it would be by crucifixion and not stoning according to the Jewish Law (Leviticus 24:15,16^{xxii}). That fulfilled the predictions of Jesus' hands and feet being pierced (Psalms 22:16^{xxiii}). Nailing Him to wood would also fit the curse of being hung on a tree, as Jesus became cursed for our sakes (Deuteronomy 21:23^{xxiv}). The timing coincided with Passover when lambs were slaughtered to remind them of God sparing them from the angel of death, and Jesus is dying as the Lamb of God to save them from the second death (John 1:29^{xxv}). It was the Feast of Unleavened Bread when all leaven was swept from houses, a picture of Jesus removing all sins from our lives (Exodus 12:15^{xxvi}). Despised and rejected by men is the wording of Isaiah 53:3^{xxvii}. He is the stone the builders rejected, which is the very words the Jews sang during this feast (Psalm 118:22^{xxviii}) but goes on to say He becomes the capstone. There are many more circumstances that all aligned at this moment. Jesus' quotation of Psalm 22:1^{xxix} while on the cross showed that He knew this to be true.

²⁴ So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. ²⁵ He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will. Luke 23:24,25 John's Gospel tells us that one of the reasons that Pilate gave in was that the religious leaders told him that anyone with sympathy for someone claiming to be king was not a friend of Caesar (John 19:12^{xxx}). Pilate saw he was being blackmailed and had to give in to stay in power. Both Pilate and the religious leaders had the same driving motivation: this world. James tells us that anyone who is a friend of the world is an enemy of God (James 4:4^{xxxi}). Jesus told the disciples those of the world would hate them because they do not know God (John 15:19^{xxxii}). Pilate yielded to the leaders' demands. They all gave in to their lust for power and comfort. The guilty went free and the innocent went to the cross.

A judiciary with people ruled by their own political interests will soon give the people what they want rather than what is right. A public ruled by their own selfish

desires will soon twist the courts to serve their desires. Justice requires nobility of character and the courage of truth-based conviction. If they handed over the perfectly innocent Christ to death, what do you think will be done to lesser men? Courts can only give us justice if they care about truth.^{xxxiii}

R. Kent Hughes points out in his commentary that Pilate was ahead of his time. He fits in quite well with today's modernist. John's Gospel tells us that when Jesus spoke to Pilate of truth, Pilate replied, "What is truth?" (John 18:38^{xxxiv}) That comes from the mouths of many post-modernists. They ask because they do not believe truth exists. Pilate could condemn an innocent man because he had the mind of modern man. It is all about survival. *"His attitude was weary and mournful, worldly-wise and smilingly sarcastic. Pilate was indeed a stranger to truth. That is why Pilate gave in."*^{xxxv}

The same battle goes on every day in the hearts of mankind. We constantly choose between pleasing ourselves or pleasing God, between denying truth exists or yielding to it. Jesus declared that He is truth (John 14:6^{xxxvi}), and His resurrection proved it! It is not a choice of which is better for us, but rather of what we really believe. It is a battle between the carnal and the spiritual, between life and death, between God and Satan over our souls.

The miracle of God's sovereignty is that the spiritual failure of the authorities would lead to death of Jesus for the sins of the world (John 3:16^{xxxvii}). That resulted in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which would enable those who receive Jesus to make right choices (Luke 24:49^{xxxviii}). It is the power to say no the carnal desires and yes to the urgings of the Holy Spirit. Son of a father was released, and Son of *the* Father was condemned.

When we come to Jesus seeking forgiveness, we are like Barabbas. We have hated people in our hearts and Jesus said that was no different from murder (Matthew 5:21,22^{xxxix}; 1 John 3:15^{xl}). We have been insurrectionist against God, for all sin is a sin against God (Psalm 51:4^{xli}). But the innocent died by which we guilty ones were set free. Satan was shouting for justice to be served on us. Who was shouting for our release while religious leaders shouted for Jesus to die? The Father was! And Jesus chose to do His will that *we* might live. All of us sons and daughters of an earthly father should have been condemned, but another, the innocent righteous One, willingly took our place and the punishment we deserved (Isaiah 53:12^{xlii}). How should we then live?

Questions:

- 1 Why did the Jewish leaders want Rome to judge Jesus?
- 2 What was ironic about their accusation against Him?
- 3 Why might Pilate have wanted to release Jesus?
- 4 What did Herod and Pilate agree on?
- 5 Who was demanding Jesus be crucified? Why?
- 6 What does Barabbas mean?
- 7 What does their choice of Barabbas show us?
- 8 Why was Pilate in a bind?
- 9 How did God turn defeat into victory in this impossible situation?
- 10 How are we like Barabbas?

ⁱ **John 18:31 (ESV)**

³¹ Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death."

ⁱⁱ **Galatians 3:13 (ESV)**

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—

ⁱⁱⁱ **1 Corinthians 6:1 (ESV)**

¹ When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?

^{iv} **Luke 20:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

^v **Luke 22:70 (ESV)**

⁷⁰ So they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am."

^{vi} **John 18:36 (ESV)**

³⁶ Jesus answered, "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."

^{vii} **Isaiah 53:7 (ESV)**

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.

^{viii} **John 10:35-36 (ESV)**

³⁵ If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—³⁶ do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?

^{ix} **Romans 11:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

^x **Ephesians 2:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility

^{xi} **Mark 12:30-31 (ESV)**

³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

^{xii} **1 John 2:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

^{xiii} **Matthew 14:6-9 (ESV)**

⁶ But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod, ⁷ so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. ⁸ Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter." ⁹ And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given.

^{xiv} **Isaiah 66:2 (ESV)**

² All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

^{xv} **Isaiah 53:7 (ESV)**

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.

^{xvi} **Proverbs 26:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.

^{xvii} **Matthew 5:39 (ESV)**

³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

^{xviii} **Matthew 27:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream."

^{xix} **Luke 22:66 (ESV)**

⁶⁶ When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said,

^{xx} **Proverbs 30:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name? Surely you know!

^{xxi} **John 19:5 (ESV)**

⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!"

^{xxii} **Leviticus 24:15-16 (KJV)**

¹⁵ And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin.

¹⁶ And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, *and* all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name *of the LORD*, shall be put to death.

^{xxiii} **Psalm 22:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—

^{xxiv} **Deuteronomy 21:23 (ESV)**

²³ his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

^{xxv} **John 1:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

^{xxvi} **Exodus 12:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

^{xxvii} **Isaiah 53:3 (ESV)**

³ He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

^{xxviii} **Psalm 118:22 (ESV)**

²² The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

^{xxix} **Psalm 22:1 (ESV)**

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

^{xxx} **John 19:12 (ESV)**

¹² From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar."

^{xxxi} **James 4:4 (ESV)**

⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

^{xxxii} **John 15:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

^{xxxiii} Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus in Luke.

^{xxxiv} **John 18:38 (ESV)**

³⁸ Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him.

^{xxxv} Hughes, Kent- Preaching the Word - Luke, Volume II: That You May Know the Truth.

^{xxxvi} **John 14:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

^{xxxvii} **John 3:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

^{xxxviii} **Luke 24:49 (ESV)**

⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

^{xxxix} **Matthew 5:21-22 (ESV)**

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

^{xi} **1 John 3:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

^{xlii} **Psalms 51:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

^{xliii} **Isaiah 53:12 (ESV)**

¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.