

March 22, 2020

“Tried before Pilate”
Matthew 27:11-26

FCF: “Where are you, Lord?”

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Whatever we’ve heard, however it may seem, the Lord’s ways are such (magnet) that we can look to Him in all things.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

These are obviously unique circumstance. This isn’t live. It’s recorded in a near empty sanctuary. Because of a coronavirus, medical experts and government officials are urging social distance. So we find ourselves pursuing virtual ministry to a church disbursed. Strange times. Consider this. If you had been told two weeks ago this is where we would be, would you have believed it? I doubt it. Likely you would have dismissed it, saying such things are unheard of.

These are strange times. And troubling. Deep down, there is a question rumbling within - whether we’ve asked it out loud or not. “Lord, what’s happening here? Where are you?” The text we’re about to look at connects to such things, even as Jesus approached His darkest hour.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 27:11-26](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Do you feel stretched? There was a lot going on before this current crisis. And this has added a great deal more. So the stress can feel pretty heavy. Why? Partly it’s the confusion as to where things are going. But it’s more than that. We don’t feel safe. We’ve lost control. Or, put another way, we thought we had some control all along and now have to face we never did.

What then? That brings us to our text. Before we go any further, let’s consider where we are. It’s the early hours of Good Friday. Jesus has stood before the Sanhedrin and been charged with blasphemy, a capital offense requiring Roman approval if the death penalty is to be carried out. Which brings us to this moment in the flow of events, Jesus standing before Pontius Pilate.

If there was ever a time in which it seemed that God was powerless to act, surely this was it. But a closer look shows just the opposite. For whatever else we may have heard, however things may seem, the Lord’s ways are such that we can look to Him in all things. However we may feel, however things may seem, the Lord’s ways are such we can look to Him in all things.

How can we know that? I want to highlight three things in this text. First, the story is true. Second, the verdict is in. And then, third, the king has come. That’s how we can know.

I. THE STORY IS TRUE

It begins with this. The story is true. All of this is real. This is not fantasy. It is history.

A) Historical Record

1. Pontius Pilate – the man

What do we know of Pilate? Josephus described him as greedy, inflexible, cruel, and willing to resort to robbery and oppression. Philo, a 1st century philosopher, said Pilate was ([READ quote](#)) “*by nature rigid and stubbornly harsh*” and “*of spiteful disposition and...exceedingly wrathful.*”

2. Pontius Pilate – his resume

So that's the man. Then there's his resume. By this point, Pilate had been governor in Judea for seven years and had managed to anger an embittered population such that the protests sent back to Rome had put him on something of a probation. Compounding that, the man who had helped Pilate get this post had been executed for a plot against the emperor. So things are complicated for Pilate. He was already in trouble. All of which forms the backdrop of what we see here.

The point? This is not fantasy. This is history – both the individuals and the events.

B) Ongoing Implications

And the fact we are dealing with an historical record has some ongoing implications.

1. Accuracy of the accounts

First, the accuracy of the accounts we read here in Matthew's Gospel. This is to be believed.

2. Claims of those author

But not just the accuracy of the accounts but the claims of the author. From the start, Matthew has challenged the reader to consider who Jesus is, why He came, and how we should respond.

If this is in fact history, then those questions need to be taken seriously. Very seriously.

Application:

Much has been made of a supposed disconnect between the "Jesus of history" studied by scholars and the "Jesus of faith" invented by the church. Sadly, many have believed this. Think of the erosion that causes. It rips out the foundation such that there is nothing that holds when the storm comes. After all, if this is all made up, we just have to do our best to make our way.

We see that in the two extreme responses to COVID-19. One side says the sky is falling. Nothing is firm, all seems fleeting. They are frightened. We have something to share and show.

The other extreme says the whole thing is a hoax. And that side may be in just as much trouble. How? Yes, it may be they've been selective in their news and simply don't recognize the stakes. But it may also be that they have adopted a posture of bravado. Why? They too have no foundation. They aren't facing the crisis because they can't. They too have nowhere to turn.

But the story is true. So no matter how things seem, we can look to the Lord in all things.

II. THE VERDICT IS IN

But not only is the story is true. The verdict is in. This is what the Gospel writers make clear again and again - Jesus' innocence, the fact He'd done no wrong, that He had no guilt.

A) How This Is Shown

1. Pilate's insight into the motives

(**READ Matthew 27:18**) Pilate was savvy. He knew it was envy, not justice, driving the charges.

2. The message from Procula

(**READ Matthew 27:19**) Romans viewed dreams as omens. This was tailored just for the man.

3. Pilate's public proclamation

(**READ Matthew 27:24**) Understand that this was not Pilate's attempt to wash away his guilt. This was a symbolic demonstration that he, as the judge, found no grounds for the sentence.

The idea being, "In case you missed it, even Pontius Pilate knew Jesus to be innocent."

B) Why This is Significant

There is a deep significance to all this that carries over still today. Think with me.

1. Our sin

We, every one of us, stand guilty before God. One could say of two crimes. First, blasphemy – making ourselves to be our own god. Second, sedition – cosmic treason against the true God.

2. Our Savior

Jesus has come, the man standing in the dock before Pilate, as our Savior – the Savior of sinners, of blasphemers and rebels. Ours is the guilt. His is the innocence. He has come to bear our guilt, ironically charged by His accusers of our very crimes, and to give us His righteous record.

Do you see? The verdict is in. This is tremendously significant. Eternally significant.

Application:

How is this important to us now? Many of us are working and schooling from home. We are out of rhythm, on top of each other. Services are disrupted and we feel inconvenienced. Our emotions are swirling because of an enemy unseen. What does that do to you? It exposes you.

We're forced to reckon with the dark shadows of our hearts which, even if we knew were there before, are now hard to hide. Anger. Fear. Envy. Greed. Laziness. Discontentment. Our gods of personal peace and affluence have been greatly angered. Like it or not, the stresses have caused our sin to be exposed. And so too has our need for a Savior to forgive us and free us.

Illustration:

Think of this man Barabbas (**READ Matthew 27:15-17, 20-21**). There would be three men hung on crosses that day. But Barabbas would not be one of them. Why? Jesus was hung in his place. Jesus died that he might then live. Jesus was cursed that he might then go free.

Understand that these were real events. But this was also a picture of what Jesus has done for every person through the ages who turns to Him, as the only One who can bear our sin.

The verdict is in. So no matter how things seem, we can look to the Lord in all things.

III. THE KING HAS COME

The story is true. The verdict is in. And the King has come. All through Matthew's Gospel, whether explicitly or implicitly, Jesus has spoken to the fact that He is the King.

A) Jesus' Testimony

1. The question

Listen to His testimony (**READ Matthew 27:11a**). This is a loaded question. Are you a king?

2. The answer

Now listen to Jesus' answer (**READ Matthew 27:11b**). This is not the first time He has said this. It's a Greek expression that puts the responsibility back on the questioner. Why this phrasing? Jesus knows that any vision of a kingdom held by His enemies was nothing like His own.

B) Pilate's Cowardice

Let's shift from Jesus' testimony to Pilate's cowardice, his response. He knows Jesus to be innocent and wants to avoid sentencing Him. But he walks a fence so as to appease everyone.

1. Barabbas brought forth

This is why Pilate brings forth Barabbas, thinking they will choose Jesus, giving them a chance to do so, foolishly underestimating the influence of their leaders. Justice demanded far more.

2. Other half measures

But justice was not Pilate's concern. The appeasement continues with more half-measures. The other Gospel writers speak of an earlier flogging, a presentation of Jesus to the crowds to try and pacify them. But here's the thing. If Jesus was innocent, He should have been released.

The King has come. Pilate got wrong the One who came to make everything right.

Application:

Why is the kingdom vital to stress? This world is fallen. We know too well the disease, empty lives, broken relationships, poverty, injustice, and racism. It's all around. The King has come to undo all that, to take back what is His. That's what His parables and miracles are about. The kingdom has come. Not yet in full but in fact. Its fullness will come with His return.

Which is grounds for hope. We need not despair about anything. We need not lie awake in our worry and fear. The gospel is news of the King, a message of hope. We need not despair.

And we must not fear, not even in a pandemic. This is not a time, nor is it ever a time, to withdraw. Yes, we must respect social distance to flatten the curve. But we can and we must confidently and creatively seek ways to love and to serve. The whole world has been struck with this virus. We must not be less but all the more generous with our time, talent, and treasure.

The King has come. No matter how things may seem, we can look to Him in all things.

CONCLUSION:

Back to where we started. In the midst of the confusion and uncertainty, we have the assurance that the story is true, the verdict is in, and the King has come. I don't know who is watching this but I want to wrap this up by saying something to three groups of people.

To those of you here who are assured of these things – you are a disciple, believing and following Jesus already – don't stray from them. These are the basics and fundamentals which we never outgrow. Others need you to hold strong. These essentials are your life. Don't stray.

To those of you who are seeking, asking, wondering if this could really be – you find yourself pulled in this direction but are still not quite sure – start here. Mull these things over

and consider them carefully. You may well find yourself much like a child just learning to eat, to walk, to make your way. Seize this time. Ask your questions. And then press forward.

And to those of you who are recovering, starting over, coming back – you believed before but got burned along the way, gave it up but found you never really could leave it all behind – start here. Jesus knows. He is with you, even now. You can tell Him anything, everything.

For any of us, for all of us, whatever we may have heard, however things may seem, the Lord's ways are such that we can look to Him in all things. And we see it here with Jesus.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Whatever we've heard, however it may seem, the Lord's ways are such (magnet) that we can look to Him in all things.