

Episode #941 Matthew 27 Part 3-Choosing Barabbas

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. The Lord’s trial before the Sanhedrin is complete, and they have condemned Him to death. However, they did not want to put Him to death the Jewish way, but wanted Pilate to crucify Him, so as to humiliate Him and cause Him to suffer the maximum amount. The Lord had been led to Pilate, who well knew that He was not guilty of anything.

III. Jesus or Barabbas? Matthew 27:15-26.

- A. Verse 15. Israel was an occupied country, and patriots were constantly trying to do something to hinder the Roman army of occupation. Israelite after Israelite was sent to prison because he was a patriot. As a custom and a sop to throw out, Pilate would release to the people a prisoner whom they had selected. Wished is *thelo*, one of the Greek words for will meaning the desire or wish.
- B. Verse 16. The word for notorious, *episemos*, occurs only twice, the other time for notable (illustrious) apostles. Barabbas’ name in Aramaic means “Son of the Father,” and some believe this was a name he took on himself and that he was a false Christ. In that case, the crowd, encouraged by their wicked religious leaders, rejected the true Messiah and demanded the false! John 18:40 tells us that he was a robber. Luke 23:19 tells us that he had led a revolt in Jerusalem and committed murder during the revolt. He had then been captured and was in prison. Yet he was a popular man, as men become when they make such fights against tyrants. Yet it seems Barabbas did not do this just because he was a patriot, but also because it gave him a chance to do some robbing and looting, even as people today will claim to be “protesting,” but really their protest is more about being able to loot things from a store than about a protest. Still, he was a notable prisoner, and was popular with certain people.
- C. Verse 17. “Were gathered together” is *sunago*, assembled as one, as in the synagogue. “Want” is the Greek *thelo*, whom do you wish or desire? Peter (using a different word for desire) accuses the Jews of Jerusalem of denying the Holy One and the Just, and desiring a murderer be granted to them instead. Pilate makes no determination one way or the other on whether or not He is actually the Christ, but mentions as a fact that He is called this. If he wished to pacify the leaders with this question, or make them realize they were better off with Jesus than Barabbas, he miscalculated.
- D. Verse 18. Pilate could not possibly miss this obvious fact. The Lord had truly done nothing against them. Yet by His words and actions He showed up their wickedness and hypocrisy. This they could not endure. They had gotten by with promoting themselves as great leaders of the people by no one questioning their authority or spiritual superiority. When the Lord called these things into question, they saw their corrupt empire crumbling around them. In hatred they sought to destroy Him.
- E. Verse 19. “Judgment seat” is the Greek word *bema*. It meant a raised platform or a step up, but it came to mean a platform from which judgment was made, a judgment platform, then a judgment throne or seat of judgment. The fact that Pilate “sat” there shows there was a seat, though the word also means he was seated on a raised platform. Christ has His Own *bema* seat, as we know from Romans 14:10 and II Corinthians 5:10. “Wife” as is typical for Greek is “his woman,” meaning his wife.

- Traditionally her name was Claudia Procula (Procule, Procle), a Jewish proselyte, and became a Christian. She is venerated by the Orthodox Church. But this is all tradition, probably based on a good feeling toward her produced by the fact that she spoke for Christ. The Bible gives her no recommendation other than that. There is certainly no evidence that she was the Claudia of II Timothy 4:21, as some have speculated. “Sent” is *apostello*, she sent officially to him, more than a private message. She wanted to make it very clear what she thought. This was not enough to sway her husband, however. “Just Man” or righteous One. She becomes another witness to the innocence of the Lord. This dream must have made a very strong impression on her, and caused her much distress. The sixth and last time a dream is mentioned in Matthew, and indeed in the New Testament. Dreams are only mentioned in Matthew, the book of being “in Israel.” To make much of dreams today, then, is a mistake.
- F. Verse 20. Notice that the chief priests and elders worked the crowd to bring about this result. Note it was the same crowd who plotted this whole event and the Lord’s death. It was not spontaneous, but had a guiding hand. In the same way, we believe Satan has a guiding hand in many of the wicked and cruel things that take place on earth, though that does not mean his agents bear no responsibility. “The multitudes” is the crowd. Yet remember that just the mob that was sent to arrest Him was called a “crowd.” People act like Jerusalem and Israel were a one-horse burg, with only a single crowd in it, and this “crowd” cheered Him at the triumphal entry and called for His death before Pilate. Yet this is foolish, and is simply slanderous towards His followers and those who supported Him. Is it right to gossip untruths against our fellow followers of Christ this way? This is rather like someone from a foreign country watching a Donald Trump rally where the crowd is cheering him, and then the next day watching a Democratic event where the crowd is against him, and saying, “What fickle people the Americans are! One day they love Donald Trump, and the next day they hate him!” Of course, we understand that these are two different crowds. Why, then, do we not understand this when it comes to the followers of the Lord and the followers of the chief priests and scribes? Yet we get great satisfaction in continually besmirching the character of our fellow believers! “Destroy” is the Greek *apollumi*, meaning cause to be destroyed or to perish, by asking for it.
- G. Verse 21. The time has apparently passed that he gave them to decide. Pilate knew that the chief priests and elders were envious of the Lord, but he knew that the crowds were largely on His side, so he thought the crowd would support Him here, yet he miscalculated. There are several factors to take into account. One is that this is in the early morning, during the Passover season. Many in this crowd are probably the same ones who were flunkies of the priests who went to arrest the Lord in the first place, the very ones Peter denied the Lord to in the high priest’s courtyard. Few of the Lord’s followers even knew He had been arrested, since that had taken place in the dark of night. His disciples were so frightened they clearly had not gone on a campaign to call out His followers and get them to demand His release. But who did know that their beloved leader was imprisoned? The followers of Barabbas! They knew of Pilate’s custom of releasing a prisoner, and many had probably gotten up early and come to the governor to call for his release. These would be easy for the chief priests and scribes to manipulate, for the idea that someone else might be released instead would provoke them, and they would be easily led, not only to call

out against it, but to demand whatever the priests suggested to be done to Him instead. So the situation is all stacked against Pilate's plan, and he does not know it.

IV. Conclusion: Rather than simply doing the right thing, Pilate tried to be clever and manipulate the crowd into demanding the Lord's release for him. He did not reckon on the power and intrigue of the wicked religious leaders. Pilate was the ruler and had the responsibility to do what was just and right. Instead, he let the leaders manipulate him, and then tried to ineffectually claim innocence for what he ordered his men to do! He could not escape this way, however, and must bear his guilt. Do we do what we know is right, or do we try to act in cleverness and then come up with excuses?