

Forgive Us When We Despise Your Great Salvation!

Matthew 27:15-26

Lent seems to be the time of the year when we hear the same story over and over again. You can ask almost any 5th grader and they can recount the whole Passion History. So why is it that we keep reviewing the events? We review these lessons year after year because it is necessary for us to know these events, to hear the Passion of our Lord, to enable us to recognize how **we like Pilate and the mob Despise God's Great Salvation**. It is vital for us to know this 2000 yr old story for it is the story of God wrath & love. As I read the lesson for this evening, keep our theme in mind and ponder which of the words and actions of Pilate or of the mob, **do you** most closely relate to, today!

A lesson from Matthew 27, beginning with the 15th verse.... ¹⁵ *Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd.* ¹⁶ *At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas.* ¹⁷ *So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"* ¹⁸ *For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.* ¹⁹ *While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."* ²⁰ *But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.* ²¹ *"Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered.* ²² *"What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!"* ²³ *"Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"* ²⁴ *When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"* ²⁵ *All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"* ²⁶ *Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.* -Matthew 27:15-26

Each year I read these lessons, I wonder what was going through Pilate's mind that early Friday morning? Some years I get angry with Pilate, other years it seems like I pity the guy, and this year I am just baffled by his actions. Let me explain.

You almost feel sorry for Pilate, he has this mob of people before him who have a history of rioting and causing trouble for Roman leaders. And here they are on his door step at the crack of dawn urging Pilate to order the death sentence for Jesus. Oh, and if he doesn't do what they want they're going to write Caesar and tell him that Pilate befriends people claiming to be kings in place of Caesar.

Then there are the times you get angry with Pilate. Such as after interviewing Jesus three times, he finds him innocent of all charges. **Yet, he does nothing!** I tend to get even more upset when I read about how he knew Jesus was innocent yet, ordered him to be whipped, scourged, that by which people died because of how horrific it was. Can you believe this guy!

What really gets me is how could he know Jesus was innocent and went through with the sentencing! And if all his questioning hadn't been enough his own wife says the guy is innocent. I've not been married long but if my wife sent me a note like this – I think I might pay it some attention.

And then there comes the baffling side of Pilate. His job is to maintain peace and justice in the land. He has been given 600-1000 Roman Legionnaires (men trained to kill) to assist him with keeping order in Jerusalem alone. This does not take into account the total of 10,000 + men throughout the whole Palestinian area he governed. HOW COULD HE BE SCARED of the Mob?

But what baffles me the most is Pilate's actions at the end. ²⁴ *When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"* Pilate has the nerve to stand and declare to the crowd how he is *"innocent of this man's blood."* He was the governor, he was

the only one who could issue the death sentence, and he claims innocence? Who's he kidding?

Perhaps what is most disheartening about Pilate's words and actions are how much like him we really are! We travel the road to the cross year after year and at some point try to justify to ourselves, "*It's really not my fault Jesus was scourged. It's not my fault he was crucified.*" **We Despise God's Great Salvation** when we try as Pilate to say, *I'm innocent, it's not my fault.* Or when we harbor that inkling within us that says, "*I'm innocent because I'm a member of such and such a church. It doesn't matter that I don't talk to him or study his word outside these walls.*" It is in these ways and many others that you yourself know, that we stand next to Pilate and utter those shameful, guilt ridden words, "*I'm innocent.*" Words which we are quick to say, yet then weigh us down with the guilt of what we have done.

The irony of the situation for Pilate was the one he was condemning was the only one who could say to him, "***You are innocent, you are forgiven.***" God's wrath burns when **we Despise his Salvation**, by claiming innocence when our only true plea can be guilty as charged on all counts. His anger burns when we try to justify our sinful actions, or play down the wretched thoughts. Yet, it was for these moments in our lives that Jesus endured the suffering we recount during Lent. Jesus stepped between you and God when God lowered his gavel, sentencing you to suffer for your actions. Jesus stepped in and bore the full wrath of God and he did so willingly so that he can say to you, "***You are innocent. The punishment for you has been paid.***"

We hear this message time and time again, and I pray for you that it nearly brings tears to your eyes each time.

Hearing Jesus say to us, "***You are innocent because I've paid for you,***" makes the following statement all the harder to grasp and understand. As Pilate stood there performing his show of innocence the Jewish mob cried out, "***Let his blood be on us and our children.***" How could someone say this? Especially about the blood of the Messiah? The Jews were not asking for Jesus blood to be put on them to declare them innocent. No they were saying, "Kill this Imposter and if he isn't an imposter we will be responsible for killing an innocent man!"

What brash words from a crowd who 5 days earlier was crying, "Hosanna!" You gotta wonder what changed in this group in those few days? What would make people go from dropping their cloths on the ground, praising Jesus as the Messiah, to screaming en mass, "Crucify!"

We do have some understanding though. Have you ever watched a child who has a favorite professional sports athlete. The child idolizes the athlete. Learns all his stats, the pictures are on the walls. One day the child takes a ball to be signed by his idolized athlete. The child has dreamed of this occasion for months and it finally arrives. After standing outside the locker room for hours after the game waiting for the athlete to appear finally the door opens and out walks this child's hero. The player, upset from a hard loss, walks right by brushing the kid off, not even acknowledging the his presence. At that moment the child's love turns to hate. His hero is no hero, but a mean man who hates kids.

This is the feeling the Jews had. They had been waiting for the long prophesied Messiah. One who would rule them forever, who would provide for their needs and restore Israel to its glory. Jesus fit this description. Think of the thousands he had healed. Recall the tens of thousands he fed with some bread and fish. And oh the miracles and his teaching with authority. The Jews were sure this was their promised Messiah.

Only problem was the Messiah they were looking for wasn't the one foretold in the prophecies. They were looking for a king to rise up from among them who would rid Israel of the Romans, in fact who would make the Romans the Jews' slaves. They wanted an earthly king, not a king who would save them from their sins. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem the people were in high hopes that at this religious festival he would show himself as their political leader. But when he was presented, bloody, beaten, bruised and maligned by the High Priests their loyalty turned to hate.

They had put their hope in him and in their eyes he had let them down and wasn't what they were looking

for! **Sadly, we can all too often commiserate with the Jews.** No, perhaps we don't so blatantly reject the salvation of our souls as they did. After all, we know our Bible stories, our catechisms, and our creeds. We know what Lent and Good Friday are all about.

Sometimes though we get stuck with this kind of thinking. We think we should have the good life because we have become Christians. Sitting in church it is easy to remember that as Christians we aren't promised the good life. The passages come to mind while we are here of how this life is of trials and sorrows. But on Tuesday, when troubles are mounting up and we pray and pray and it seems like God isn't listening and he seems to be blessing all the non-Christians around us, the temptation is there.

We ask, why did we have to get sick? Why does he let us have all these money troubles? Why do we have trouble making good friends? Why are we the ones who are depressed? Why are we the ones who can't seem to get on top in life? Why can't God make things a little easier for us?

A poison has attacked our faith. What he came to bring us through his death suddenly doesn't seem as important as the list of things we wish he would do for us in the here and now. And something inside us begins to feel betrayed by him. And if we listen closely, we can hear the far-off cries of anger and rejection from the wrathful mob that we are getting all too close to.

At times like these we all the more need to rely on the passages that are not only for Sunday School memorization or pastor's sermon. We cling to the passages that remind us, that we are loved children of God. We have dared to get close to the mob's screams of **Despising God's Great Salvation** and we come to him asking for forgiveness. To which he responds, *"You, are innocent! My blood covers your sins. Go and sin no more. Don't be discouraged by trials and persecutions, endure them, and I will be with you always."*

It is this promise that we struggle to remember amidst the pain, sorrow and troubles. It is this promise we need to keep before our eyes. This Lent, as the news continues to remind us of the country's financial position, and as you face your own trials, **let this walk be a walk that strengthens your faith and trust in what your Savior has done for you.** As the doubts come, look to the cross and remember, HE went there because he loved you. He endured it all to call you his own. And he currently is working in your life to bring you closer to him.

Father Thank you for your Great Salvation!

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Midweek Lent #3

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