

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 27 (PART 2)

Matthew 27:11-14 - Jesus Before Pilate

Matthew presents this moment as far more than a simple religious disagreement. Jesus now stands before Pontius Pilate, the highest Roman authority in Judea. Though the Jewish leaders could condemn Jesus religiously for blasphemy, Rome alone possessed the authority to carry out capital punishment, which is why Jesus must now stand before Pilate. The political atmosphere in Jerusalem was tense, especially during Passover when massive crowds gathered and hopes for deliverance from Roman rule intensified. Pilate's primary concern was not justice, but maintaining order and preventing unrest. Any man presented as a potential "king" or messianic figure immediately became a political concern in the eyes of Rome.

What do we know about Pilate? Pontius Pilate served as the Roman governor of Judea from approximately 26–36 AD under Emperor Tiberius. His primary responsibility was not spiritual leadership or justice, but maintaining order in a politically volatile region filled with growing resentment toward Roman occupation. During major feasts like Passover, governors would travel to Jerusalem because massive crowds created a heightened risk of unrest/rebellion. This helps explain why Jesus' trial quickly became a political matter in Rome's eyes. Though the Jewish leaders had condemned Jesus religiously, only Rome possessed the authority to carry out capital punishment.



Historical sources outside the Bible portray Pilate as a harsh and politically pressured ruler. Ancient writers such as Josephus and Philo describe him as insensitive to Jewish customs, willing to use violence, and frequently involved in conflicts with the Jewish people. By the time Jesus stood before him, Pilate likely already had a strained relationship with the nation he governed and could not afford another public disturbance.

The **"Pilate Stone"** is a first-century Roman inscription discovered in 1961 at Caesarea Maritima that contains the name of Pontius Pilate, providing important archaeological confirmation of the Gospel accounts. The partially preserved inscription identifies Pilate as "Prefect of Judea" and appears to record a dedication honoring Emperor Tiberius.

Q - Why didn't Jesus answer at this moment? **Q** - Why do you think Pilate was "amazed"?

Matthew 27:15-18 - Barabbas Or Jesus?

What is this custom? - The release of a prisoner during Passover appears to have been a custom used by the Roman governor to maintain goodwill and reduce tension among the Jewish people during the feast. There were massive crowds during Passover and that heightend things. By offering the crowd the choice of releasing a prisoner, Pontius Pilate was likely attempting to calm the crowds and avoid unrest during one of the most sensitive times of the year.

Who was Barabbas? - Barabbas is described in the Gospel accounts as a notorious prisoner involved in rebellion and murder (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19). He was likely connected to violent anti-Roman insurrection, making him the kind of figure some Jews may have viewed as a revolutionary or political hero. His name is also significant. “Barabbas” means “son of the father” (bar = son, abba = father), creating a striking contrast within the narrative.

“Barabbas, a notable prisoner who was doubtless a Zealot, captured along with two of his colleagues by the Roman security forces. He was a freedom fighter who had committed murder in an attempted coup. Contrary to Pilate’s expectation, the crowd, egged on by the chief priests, asked for Barabbas, so Jesus went to die on the cross prepared for Barabbas.” (Source: Michael Green, “The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven, The Bible Speaks Today”, page 291.)

I wonder what Pilate was thinking when he made this offer? Do you think he was using this as his way of releasing Jesus, because of course the people wouldn’t want the “notorious prisoner” released.

Matthew 27:19 - Pilate’s Wife Dream

Matthew is the only gospel that records this information. Dreams were taken seriously in the ancient world, often as signs or omens from the gods. So the fact that Pilate’s wife has a dream (is it fair to call it a nightmare based on it causing her to “suffer greatly”?) the night before this moment would have been significant to Pilate.

It doesn’t impact him to the point of doing what is right and just. But it does impress upon him that he needs to absolve himself from what’s about to happen in some way. He is stuck between the pressure of his wife’s bedroom dream and the madness of the mob below his balcony.

Matthew 27:20-23 - The Religious Leaders Conspire The Crowds Against Jesus

The Jerusalem crowds are shouting to their Roman governor to use the brutal Roman tool of crucifixion on one of their own. This was the same crowd that a week before was shouting “Hosanna!” with joy and expectation. This is another one of those moments where you think about how silly it seems that someone would be duped like that, but then consider how susceptible we really are to this kind of persuasion, especially when it is done by certain figures, especially when those figures have power and influence.

There are two things to highlight from this:

1 - The Power Of Persuasion: Matthew tells us plainly that “the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds” (27:20). The crowds had formerly admired Jesus, or at the very least held a neutral opinion toward Him, yet under the influence of their leaders they now ask for Barabbas and demand Jesus be crucified. One of the most sobering realities in this passage is that the crowds are not primarily being influenced by immoral criminals or pagan Romans, but by their own spiritual leaders. The chief priests and elders used their influence not to lead people toward truth, but away from it. This reminds us that spiritual influence is powerful and therefore dangerous when misused. Religious language, titles, institutions, or confidence do not guarantee that someone is leading people according to the will of God.

This passage also forces us to honestly consider how susceptible we are to persuasion ourselves. It is easy to read this story and wonder how people could be manipulated so quickly, yet human nature has not changed. Public opinion can be shaped remarkably fast through influential leaders, media, social pressure, fear, outrage, or repeated messaging. Entire crowds, communities, and even nations can be moved emotionally before they ever carefully examine what is true. Matthew's warning is deeply relevant: people who are not firmly grounded in truth can be swept along by persuasive voices far more easily than they realize. The crowd sincerely believed they were doing the right thing, yet they were participating in one of history's greatest injustices.

2 - The Majority Can Be Wrong - The fact that a majority of people hold a certain opinion can feel persuasive and convincing, but the majority is not always right. History repeatedly demonstrates that large crowds of sincere people can still be completely wrong. And that is important to remember because it is difficult to stand apart from the crowd. While some people naturally resist authority or enjoy challenging the mainstream, most people simply want to fit in, be accepted, avoid conflict, and not feel isolated from those around them. That desire for acceptance can make human beings far more influenceable than we often realize.

In many ways, modern culture amplifies this same dynamic. Loud, influential voices in media, entertainment, and social media can create the impression that certain beliefs or moral views are universally accepted and unquestionable. Yet that is not always reality. Sometimes there is what people call a "silent majority", many individuals who quietly disagree but are hesitant to speak because they do not want conflict, criticism, or isolation. But even beyond that, Scripture reminds us that truth is not determined by volume, popularity, or majority opinion. The crowd can be wrong, and at times the majority view can stand directly opposed to the truth of God.

Matthew 27:24-26 - Pilate's Decision & Absolution

This is an ominous confession. Pilate, the gentile governor, wants to be innocent of the execution of Jesus while the chosen people, the biological descendants of Abraham confess their clear responsibility and accountability for his death.

Pilate publicly washes his hands before the crowds as a symbolic moment demonstrating he desires to be innocent of this matter. He is a politician without convictions, more concerned about the reaction of the people than justice. More swayed by pressure than truth or facts.

Q - Why is it often so difficult for people to stand firmly for what's right when public opinion is moving another way? What are some pressures in everyday life that make it easy to just go with the crowd?

Side Note: Sadly, passages like Matthew 27:25 have at times been wrongly used throughout history to justify antisemitism and hatred toward Jewish people. That is a sinful distortion of the text. Jesus himself, his disciples, the early church, and many of the first believers were Jewish. Matthew is not condemning an entire ethnic group for all time, but describing the actions of a specific crowd and leadership group in this historical moment. Ultimately, Scripture teaches that all humanity bears responsibility for sin, and Jesus willingly laid down His life for the salvation of the world.

Closing Reflections: One of the craziest moments of this record is when the crowds cry out: "His blood be upon us and our children." What a phrase. How powerfully ironic to think about Jesus' voluntary and sacrificial death, even for the very people opposing him in the crowds. Perhaps high

atop a list of “worst sins” in history, we could include the craven desire to have an innocent man executed, not to mention the promised Messiah.

The “son of the father” (Barabbas) goes free because the Son of the Father takes his place. The crowds calling for crucifixion will be gathered in Jerusalem again in 50 days for the feast of Pentecost and hear this proclamation:

Acts 2:22-24, 36 - "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know--23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power...36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- this Jesus whom you crucified"

The people crying for blood and confessing their responsibility for his death, saying “his blood shall be on us and our children (v. 25)” will hear that indeed his blood can be upon them and their children, not in guilt, but in grace:

Acts 2:38-39 - Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 "For the promise is for **you and your children** and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

Before we close, I want to highlight one other detail that is a powerful gospel nugget. It relates to Barabbas, who we discussed briefly above. Here is Dr. Michael Green with some more historical info:

“Barabbas must have had his own *first* name, and a number of the ancient manuscripts tell us what it was—Jesus! ‘Jesus’ was a common name in first-century Palestine. It is almost certain that his name was Jesus Barabbas, but that the personal name was dropped from the majority of the manuscripts out of reverence: you couldn’t have a criminal with the same name as Jesus! But you could! That is the point of Jesus’ coming and identifying with sinners. Here stood two sons of the father; two men called Jesus (YHWH is salvation, YHWH will rescue). One pillaged and killed. The other loved and suffered. People were called to choose between those two ideals, and still are. On that Good Friday, the one ended up on the cross intended for the other, and the guilty man walked away free. An amazing picture of what the cross of Christ really means! Jesus took Barabbas’ place. He took ours, too.” Michael Green, “The Message of Matthew, TBST”, page 291.

If this manuscript tradition is accurate, the scene becomes even more striking. Two men named Jesus stand before the crowd: Jesus Barabbas and Jesus Christ. One is guilty; the other innocent. One deserves judgment; the other willingly bears it. The guilty man walks free because the righteous Jesus takes his place.

That is ultimately the story of the gospel of God → Jesus Christ takes the place of sinners. He bears the judgment deserved by others so that the guilty can go free. Barabbas becomes a picture of every believer, undeserving, guilty, and released only because another stood condemned in his place. We don’t know how Barabbas lived the rest of his days. But we do know Jesus Barabbas walked away free because another took his place. So too have all who trust in Christ. The question then becomes: *how ought we to live in light of the innocent One’s sacrifice for us?*