

Luke 23:13 - 25 The Lynch Mob Takes control of Pilate

13 And Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. 15 "No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. 16 "I will therefore punish Him and release Him." 17 [Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner.] 18 But they cried out all together, saying, "Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!" 19 (He was one who had been thrown into prison for a certain insurrection made in the city, and for murder.) 20 And Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, 21 but they kept on calling out, saying, "Crucify, crucify Him!" 22 And he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt demanding death; I will therefore punish Him and release Him." 23 But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices began to prevail. 24 And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand should be granted. 25 And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will.

This is now the 6th installment of the illegal trials of Jesus of Nazareth. Previous to these verses and this story this morning we had a trial before Annas, the sort of godfather high priest who was no longer high priest at night.

Then He is tried before Caiaphas, Son in law of Annas, who is the current high priest, in the middle of the night, illegally. The Jews could not hold court in darkness of night. Their rules of justice prohibited that.

They have reached a guilty / death verdict long ago with no trials at all. So whatever these Jews are doing, whether illegal or legal, there's no interest in real justice. They're just going through the motions to arrive at their pre-conceived verdict. It's a lynch mob and a faux trial.

The third trial is in the very first light of daybreak to "legalize" their previous verdict. Caiaphas leads it but we all know Annas his father in law is behind the curtain pulling the strings. Jesus must die. For the good of the nation Jesus must die.

Next is Pilate. He must have known this was coming, having agreed the evening before to send a cohort of Roman soldiers with the chief priests and temple police to arrest Jesus and bring Him in with roman power coercing.

Pilate is shocked that the jews are so bloodthirsty for an innocent man's blood. Pilate is aware of Jesus. Fort Antonia where the Roman military presence dwells is on the temple mount just adjacent to Herod's temple. Pilate would have known Jesus entered Jerusalem with a hero's welcome and shouts of the people welcoming their new King. That's his job.

He could look across the street and see the throngs, the multitudes listening to Jesus teaching in the temple. Jesus is a religious guru with no army. Pilate isn't worried. Jesus offered no resistance when the soldiers went into the mount of Olives to bring Him in. He simply wasn't a real threat to Pilate or the romans.

But clearly He is a threat to the religious whoo haw of Israel, and Pilate probably actually enjoyed that a little bit. He hates these religious high priests and lawyers. Religious wacko's.

Pilate doesn't want to kill Jesus. Kill an innocent man who is no threat to Rome because a bunch of religious wacko people are jealous?? I don't think so. But the pressure from the wacko's is increasing.

Pilate discovers Jesus is from galilee and breathes a little sigh of relief and sends Jesus to be tried by Herod Antipas, ruler in the region of Galilee. Herod also finds Jesus Not Guilty. Pilate was phase 4 and now Herod is phase 5.

In a civil trial it only takes 2 witnesses to stay an execution. Pilate has

declared Jesus Not Guilty. Herod has declared Jesus Not Guilty. But all that has accomplished is to turn up the volume of the Jews who are insisting upon an execution.

Herod returns Jesus to Pilate, not guilty, and we begin the 6th phase of the bogus trial by lynch mob.

13 And Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. 15 "No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him.

The Sanhedrin is the supreme court in Israel. Unoccupied Israel. That's Annas and Caiaphas and the chief priests and elders. They've ruled the death sentence. Totally illegally in every possible aspect, but their finding is for Jesus to die.

But since they are an occupied people they can't carry out their verdict without Rome agreeing. Pilate is the highest judge in Israel. To appeal Pilate you have to go all the way to Ceasar in Rome.

These verses are the final verdict of the highest court in Israel. Not guilty. Nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. And that should have been the end of the challenge. That is the final ruling by the highest court. Or is it? Pilate has some history with these folks.

Pilate was the 6th or 7th governor that Rome had put in place in Jerusalem. He was a military commander and strategist of high importance to Rome. He was a successful Roman general, not a small thing. He has the power and authority of Rome behind him, and has been given this governorship by Rome

He ruled in Jerusalem from 26 AD to 36 AD. Critics questioned whether he was real or fiction until in 1961 in Ceasarea a large stone was uncovered at the

forum there that was being archeologically unearthed and there incised on the stone is the story of Pontius Pilate. It's called the Pilate stone to this day.

Critics want to say these things are fictions made up by over zealous religious men, and then some rock gets dug up and says what the Bible has been saying all along. That happens over and over.

Pilate comes to Jerusalem to rule in 26AD and he is going to show these people who exactly is boss. He comes with his armies behind him on horses all dressed up in full regalia, and each rider has a pole with a flag, and each flag has an eagle which signifies the greatness of Rome, and above the eagle is a bust of Tiberius Ceasar, who has declared himself a deity. That image on the flags is idolatrous to the jews.

The new ruler marches in with a great show of force and idolatry, and the jews go nuts. They rioted for Pilate to take down the idolatrous flags and he refused to do it. He's going to show them who the new sheriff in town is. They riot and in a few days Pilate returns to home base which at that time is Ceasarea.

But the riotous jews follow him there and continue the harrassment. Take down the idols. This goes on for days. Finally Pilate appoints a time for the jews to meet with him in the amphitheater. They show up, and Pilate shows up with the army and the horses and surrounds the jews and informs them that he's going to slaughter them all if they do not cease and desist.

And every jew present pulls down his garment and bares his neck and says, start hacking. Well they called his bluff. Even Pilate can't get away with that. Rome doesn't allow that. So the jews showed Pilate who the boss actually was. And Pilate hates them.

Next is a water aquaduct project to improve the water supply into the city of Jerusalem. This is Pilate's project and he is in charge. And he pays for it by taking money from the temple treasury. He plunders money, given by the jews to God, to build his project. More riots. And this time Pilate sends

troops to club and stab the rioters to death. This report gets to Rome.

A third problem. Pilate has a palace in Jerusalem and he decides to decorate his palace with the shield and bust of Ceasar, a nice big golden one, and again there is rioting and the report gets all the way to Ceasar who is furious with Pilate and orders him to take that stuff down and take it to some secular temple up north where the jews aren't offended.

So Pilate, in 33 AD, is on borrowed time. Rome is weary of people rioting because of ego contests. Rome worked to not offend the different cultures that they had defeated and occupied. Pax Romana. Eventually in 36 AD, just a few years after this trial of Jesus, Pilate would be recalled for more offenses and Rome exiled him to Gaul, and he committed suicide there.

So Pilate has declared Jesus innocent. But a dangerous riot is ensuing. These jews aren't going to have it. They know how to bring pressure on Pilate, and they know he's already skating on thin ice with Rome. And ultimately, Pilate wants to do the right thing, but honestly, if push comes to shove, this Jesus isn't a hill he needs to die on.

But he's going to contend for Jesus if there's any way he can. He's innocent and Pilate knows it. Pilate doesn't want to hand Jesus over to a mob of lunatics. Pilate is going to try to appease the jewish anger by punishing Jesus even though He's an innocent man.

16 "I will therefore punish Him and release Him."

This is something the Roman's did. Sort of a warning to near offenders. A punishment to teach you to not cross over a line. The word for punish here is the word common to parents and children. It's a punishment of training. Whatever it is that Jesus did that has made you so angry, I'm going to give Him a severe punishment as training.

This is one of a couple of tricks Pilate is going to offer in order to keep an innocent man alive. Maybe he can satisfy the blood thirst if he gives Jesus a

severe enough lesson. Maybe he can assuage some of the anger.

John's account in John chapter 19 gives us insights into the depth of this abuse by Pilate, actually hoping to ultimately spare Jesus life. A trade off.

J19:1 Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged Him. 2 And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and arrayed Him in a purple robe; 3 and they began to come up to Him, and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him blows in the face. 4 And Pilate came out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no guilt in Him." 5 Jesus therefore came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, "Behold, the Man!"

This scourging was brutal. It would bring a person close to death. There is laceration and blood involved and the flesh is laid open by whips that may have sharp objects that lacerate.

Then the crown of thorns is beaten onto His head. When Pilate brings Him back out He's a bloody mess. If Pilate can satiate their blood thirst perhaps in the end he can save an innocent man. He brings a brutally beaten and bloody Jesus before them. Crown of thorns. Blood everywhere. Purple robe to mock the jews. Behold the Man! Pilate hopes this is enough. It isn't.

J19:6 When therefore the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him." 7 The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God."

The mob just keeps shouting Crucify Crucify. The scourging hasn't worked. Pilate wants to be done with this. Take Him yourselves and crucify Him. I find no guilt in Him. Bizarre. But the jews won't do it.

When Pilate hears the real charge, He claimed to be the Son of God, now he's starting to get panicky. Who is this man?

J19:8 When Pilate therefore heard this statement, he was the more afraid; 9 and he entered into the Praetorium again, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. 10 Pilate therefore said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" 11 Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin."

Don't you know I have power to crucify you. Wrong. Jesus informs him that he is powerless to do anything outside of God's sovereign plan. Pilate, this is out of your control.

J19:12 As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him,

But Pilate is more freaked out than ever. He's got one more trick up his sleeves. Feast day prisoner release. It's a custom. Matthew and Mark tell us about this custom to release a prisoner at Passover.

L23:17 [Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner.]

If you have the New American Standard Bible note that this verse is in brackets. The NASB has a note that tells us the earliest and best manuscripts do not include this verse. It was likely added by a well meaning scribe for clarity because both Matthew and Mark tell us this.

The Romans in order to try to live peaceably with the peoples they conquered would allow different graces to try to be benevolent. Some prisoner that the popular opinion is didn't receive justice and it was popular, Rome would release a prisoner on this day as a gesture of good will. It was a custom.

Pilate has an idea. He has in custody a dangerous villainous murderous criminal that nobody would want back in society. Someone like Charlie Manson. Someone everyone is super glad he's in prison. We're all a lot safer with that guy locked up. Please keep him incarcerated and throw away the

key. That's Barabbas.

Pilate figures if he offers a lunatic dangerous madman . . . or Jesus . . . they'll sort of be forced to keep Jesus who only does good, and refuse the dangerous criminal who nobody wants outside of prison. It's a good plan. It's a no-brainer.

There's a play on words here. Bar Abbas. Bar means Son of. Abbas means Father. This evil dangerous man's name is Son of Father. Do you want the criminally dangerous Son of Father, barabbas, or do you want the One who claims to be Son of the Father who only does good and loves everyone?

Such a deal. Such a no brainer. Barabbas means who knows who will get sliced up next. Let him out, hide the kids and wife, and make sure you're wearing a machaira, a weapon for self defense. You'll need it with that guy loose. Who's it gonna be?

J19:12b . . . but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar."

There it is. There's the pressure. If you don't give us our wishes, our bloodthirst that we're at the threshold of out of control rioting for, we'll report to Ceasar that you are one who protects claimants of kingship other than Ceasar. We'll let Ceasar know that you protect a man who claims to be King in opposition to Rome. We'll inform him that you are no friend of Ceasar.

This is an "Is this a hill I'm willing to die on" moment for Pilate. Protecting the innocent is his job. But these lunatic jews will twist things to the extent that he'll lose his job if he does the right thing. There will be a riot and a contingent to Rome to explain that Pilate has caused the riot because we jews love Ceasar and Pilate protects people who hate Ceasar. We had to riot because you are our King Ceasar, and Pilate was allowing another man to challenge your Kingship.

L23:18 But they cried out all together, saying, "Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!" 19 (He was one who had been thrown into prison for a certain insurrection made in the city, and for murder.)

The ironies just keep stacking up. Give us the dangerous murderer who we all know is in fact a true insurrectionist in place of Jesus who is innocent and who we all know is no threat to Rome, or we're going to riot and convince Ceasar that you're not a patriot.

20 And Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, 21 but they kept on calling out, saying, "Crucify, crucify Him!"

Only the mind of Satan could come up with something this diabolical and yet God will use all of this evil to make His glory in victory the more glorious. It's like, give it your best shot Satan, and then God takes the magnitude of evil, which is the greatest ever recorded or known or possible, and then His glory in the victory of Jesus is that much more glorious!

The degradation is frightening. Face pummeled by fists and disfigured. Head covered in blood by thorns that have lacerated the scalp. Dressed in mock purple, the bloody helpless King who no one wants. Isn't that degradation enough, Jews?

No, we want Him dead and we are so deranged in our thirst for His blood that we would take a thousand dangerous murderous Barabbas's if that's the cost to have Him dead. He must die. Crucify! Crucify!

22 And he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt demanding death; I will therefore punish Him and release Him."

Matthew's gospel tells us that right at this exact juncture when Pilate is going to reveal his foolproof plan to offer a dangerous criminal, or Jesus who heals you and does good, just as he's going to do that Pilate gets a note from his wife.

We don't talk enough about the providence of God. God is in sovereign control of every detail that happens here. The multitude might have reacted differently at this point. Barabbas is a dangerous criminal. Really? We want Barabbas and not Jesus. That's non-sensical.

But Matthew tells us just as Pilate makes that announcement, there's an interlude. Just long enough for the leaders to convince the multitude, take the deal. Take Barabbas. And they do.

M27:16 And they were holding at that time a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. 17 When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" 18 For he knew that because of envy they had delivered Him up. 19 And while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him." 20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes to ask for Barabbas, and to put Jesus to death. 21 But the governor answered and said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas."

That's the providence of God that orchestrates what, a 180 second interlude? 5 minutes? How long did that little conference with his wife take. BTW she's a 3rd not guilty witness to include with Pilate and Herod. However long that took for him to step away and get a message from his wife . . . it was enough for the Jewish chief priests to convince the multitude to shout give us Barabbas! Crucify Jesus!

Fickle multitude. A cloud of darkness has enveloped these folks. L22:53b *but this hour and the power of darkness are yours.*" Wikipedia defines **herd mentality**; (*Herd mentality, mob mentality and pack mentality, also lesser known as gang mentality, describes how people can be influenced by their peers to adopt certain behaviors on a largely emotional, rather than rational, basis.*)

Pilate is interrupted by a message from his wife, and the pack mentality makes it's move, controlled by all of the powers of unseen darkness. Give us Barabbas. Crucify Jesus. Totally irrational on every possible level.

23 But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices began to prevail.

The herd, the pack, has begun to boil and Pilate has lost this battle. He's made up his mind, whoever this Jesus is, overruling his own conscience, his wife's plea, all the demands of justice, whoever He is, Pilate decides, this isn't the hill I'm willing to die on. They will win. I will lose.

At that moment, whenever it was, Pilate has become the latest illustration of Jesus words; [35] *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.* [36] *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* Mark 8:35,36

The moment has come. Pilate has lost this battle with the jews, and by trying to save his own skin, he has gained a territorial governorship for Rome for a few short years, perhaps just 3 more years if this is 33AD, and then he'll lose that anyways.

He'll get sent to Spain. He'll take his own life. His soul was already lost when he chose to have this world at the cost of Jesus.

24 And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand should be granted. 25 And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will.

There is a sense in which every participant in this tragic event made a calculated choice. I've mentioned Blaise Pascal the mathematician more than once for his famous quote. Pascal famously said;

“All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means

they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.”

Every participant in Jesus arrest and trial and conviction to death made conscious choices driven by their own wills to the end of greater happiness. They calculated the cost / benefit equation and chose the benefits of this world. Now!

Judas was disillusioned with Jesus. The writing was on the wall. He wasn't the version of Messiah that Judas was interested in for his own happiness. Judas was going to be someone important in a literal kingdom set up by Jesus in Jerusalem as Rome was conquered and removed.

Jesus was Judas ticket to wealth and power and distinguishment. But he could see it wasn't going down that way. So Judas got out with whatever little golden parachute he could manage to escape with. Sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave in that culture.

He did that for his own happiness. And he hung himself. His torture by his own conscience caused him to choose his own death. Better to be dead. Happier to be dead. Judas is in torment 2000 years later. Except there are no days, just eternity in torment.

The chief priests and scribes and pharisees, the leaders of Israel, the elders who ruled the false religion all made their choices about Jesus according to their quest for happiness. Jesus was a direct challenge to the basis by which they were powerful and wealthy. He challenged the false religion of Israel.

Happiness demands that this challenge to their power and position and wealth and happiness must be eliminated. They chose all of those things over truth. They rejected all of the miracles, all of the evidence, overwhelming evidence like nothing since creation itself, that Jesus was God.

They weighed all of that in the balance with their power and wealth and status and happiness and decided Jesus had to be eliminated. Keep the status quo. Kill Jesus. Before we lose it all, kill Jesus. Be happy.

I wonder how many of them were still alive in 70 AD when Rome came down and demolished Judaism. Wiped it clean like the top of a rock. Destroyed all of the records, all of the family records of the tribes of Judaism. Gone. And the survivors fleeing to the four winds to wander the earth, always despised.

Herod Antipas challenges his wife's nephew Agrippa for power and Agrippa convinces Tiberias that Antipas is an enemy. Herod Antipas dies in exile, having lost everything. Everything that is except his wife Herodius who used lurid temptation to cause him to choose the death of John the baptist, for his own happiness.

Herod chose to mock Jesus and befriend the governor of Judea. He chose this world and all of it's pleasures and power and wealth instead of Jesus who he found to be innocent. Mock Him and send Him back to Pilate. But he gained Pilate in the deal.

He lost his soul to gain pleasure and wealth and power. Jesus was a mild amusement, but when He wouldn't perform a trick for him, he put a purple robe on Him and mocked Him. His soldiers abused Him. And he sent Jesus back to Pilate.

Pilate chose power and wealth and title over saving Jesus. Pilate knew very well that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death. That was the finding of Pilate's court. He's an innocent man.

But the jews forced the issue. Kill Jesus and keep your governorship and your wealth and power, or refuse to kill Jesus and we will see to it that you lose everything. Pilate chose this world's wealth and power and status for the sake of his own happiness, at the cost of Jesus life.

All of these players and more, we could factor in the fickle multitude. For

their own happiness they welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem with a King's welcome. Hosanna to the Son of David, our Messiah and King. Rome, you'll need to pack and get out.

We have a King who can do miracles. He has the most effective welfare plan we've ever seen. He can create food from nothing, and the health plan, Oh my goodness, He speaks and disease flees.

But Jesus, the new King goes to the temple forum daily and pronounces condemnation after condemnation on Israel, not Rome. He isn't the King we thought we were getting. He isn't doing things to make us happy, He's doing things that make us angry.

The same multitude that shouted Hosanna the King, when they don't get the kind of King they envisioned, shouted Give us Barabbas! Crucify Jesus.

Everybody present made a choice. This world and my happiness now. If Jesus doesn't bring it, His death will make me happy.

[35] For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. [36] For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

Beloved, that equation has not changed. Pilate said it; *What then shall I do with Jesus?* That's still the question that hangs in the balance over your eternal soul. Will you keep this world for happiness sake. Or will you lose everything, up to and including your very life if need be, in order to have Jesus.

We are a culture that is so sold out to pleasure that many young people are getting to the end of that and saying, is this it? Is that all there is? No meaning, we're just a rock flying through space and there's nothing else, no answers, nothing more than pleasure? That's it?

Been there, done that, got the T-Shirt, and honestly, if that's all there is, maybe

I'll just check out. We're a culture crowded up against the cliff at the dead end of the street called pleasure and happiness, and really, if that's all there is, perhaps we'll just jump off.

We're hearing and seeing that these days. Meanwhile the cost to have Jesus, to keep Jesus is mounting. That price is going up. Those who are on the pleasure highway that haven't got to the cliff are angry with any God who would put restraints on pleasure, even if it's a loving God who gives us restraints for our own thriving, *that* God has to go and His people have to go.

Away with a God who would stand in the way of our immediate gratification. Our immediate happiness. Sin makes us happy. For a moment, it does. But Jesus pleads with us; Don't sell your eternal soul for a moment of happiness in this world that is perishing.

35 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. 36 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?^{Mark 8:35,36}