

Bi123 The Gospels 2

Lesson Bi123-21 Pilate's Decision

Everyone desires justice for their particular group or cause. Our sense of justice comes from our just and righteous Creator. When sin entered the world, earthly justice was damaged. Condemned by his own people, Jesus was innocent and sinless in God's sight. God's justice meant Jesus had to suffer at the hands of sinners for a world that was guilty before God. "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb 9:22). Jesus' blood was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28). Only because of his obedience and death would grace instead of punishment be available to all.

After Herod finished his questioning of Jesus, he was taken back to Pilate. It was the governor's custom at the Passover festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they held a notorious prisoner, whose name was Jesus Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.

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."

But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed (Matt 27:15-20).

Barabbas was a violent and dangerous criminal, in contrast to Jesus the Messiah. Pilate hoped to win the crowd over and suppress the influence of the religious leaders. He realized that jealousy was the leaders' motive, because of Jesus' increasing influence. The testimony of his wife, because of an unexplained dream, confirmed Jesus was indeed innocent. She was warning her husband, not defending Jesus.

Pilate spoke to the chief priests, the rulers and the people, saying, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. As you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him."

But the whole crowd shouted, "Away with this man! Release to us Barabbas!" (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.) These were serious crimes.

Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him” (Luke 23:13-22). Although Pilate found Jesus “not guilty,” he was willing to have him illegally beaten to satisfy the people. He may have wanted to warn them against any possible trouble in the future.

Three times Pilate tried to set Jesus free. Three times the crowds, pushed on by the religious leaders, demanded his death. Pilate seemed to desire justice, but the crowd refused. They never answered Pilate’s question about why Jesus deserved death. In the end the crowd prevailed and the murderer was set free. Is this not an example of God’s grace? Jesus, the sinless one, took the penalty for the sins of an evil rebel, who was set free.

With loud shouts they insistently demanded that Jesus be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. 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!”

All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!” So Pilate granted their demand. He released Barabbas, the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they had asked for. Then Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified (Matt 27:24-26).

The more Pilate tried to release Jesus, the less control he had of the crowd. He took his wife’s advice and by washing his hands, tried to demonstrate his innocence. This was a Jewish custom that the crowd understood. They accepted their responsibility and placed it on their descendants as well. In a real sense, we are all responsible. We are all sinners, and Jesus died for our sin.

The Jewish decision to let the guilty go free and to condemn Jesus was not forgotten by the Early Church. During his sermon recorded in Acts 3, Peter reminded the crowd in Jerusalem of what they had done. They disowned the holy and righteous Jesus sent from God. Peter also told them the good news. This same Jesus conquered sin and death for them. Now he was able to give them eternal life.

This story is **important** because it shows that Pilate, the governor, understood that Jesus was innocent, but he had neither the will nor the power to prevent his death.

The **main truth** of this story is that the innocent Jesus was condemned to die, while the rebel Barabbas was set free. Like Pilate we are unable to change our situation. So we see that Jesus, the sinless one, died for the Barabbas in each of us—the rebel who has sinned against God.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. What was the testimony of Pilate concerning Jesus when the crowds wanted him to be crucified?

- A. [Pause] If you answered that Pilate said, "He has done nothing to deserve death," you are right.
2. Who was the murderer that the crowds wanted released instead of Jesus?
A. [Pause] If you said, "Barabbas," you are correct.
3. Who were the three people who testified that Jesus was innocent of any crime?
A. [Pause] If you said, "The governor Pilate, his wife, and King Herod," you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story so you can tell it from memory. After you tell it to someone, ask them this question, "Explain how the justice of God was served when Jesus died on the cross?" Jesus by his sinless life and sacrificial death, was the only one who could pay the penalty for our sin. Memorize this verse, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb 9:22). The blood of animals was a temporary covering for sin in the Old Testament. But Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, "once for all" (Heb 10:10).