

BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

Sermon: “Give Us Barabbas” (from the “Cross Culture” Lenten sermon series)

Scripture: Matthew 27:11-54

Key take-aways from the Scripture

- In this section of the Book of Matthew, we follow the story of the trial, crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus. Chapter 27 begins with the chief priests and elders conferring against Jesus and plot His death. “They bound Him, led Him away, and handed Him over to Pilate the governor.”
- In verses 11-14, Jesus was standing before Pilate, who asked Him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”. This question was meant to determine if Jesus broke Roman law. Jesus replies with “You say so.” For the Romans, such a charge was considered treason and was punishable by death. Then Pilate told Jesus each of the accusations against Him but Jesus remained silent...to the great amazement of Pilate! It is interesting to note that Jesus’ silence is fulfilled in the prophecy of Isaiah in 53:7-12 (the prophecy of the suffering servant).
- In verses 15-26, Pilate is unimpressed with the charges against Jesus and sought to release him from prison. Since this initial trial took place on the feast of Passover, it was customary for the acting Roman governor to release a prisoner. Pilate offered the growing crowd a choice to either release Jesus or a man named Barabbas, who was in prison on charges of murder. Verse 19 explains that while Pilate was sitting in the “judge’s seat”, his wife sent a message to him: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.” During this time, the religious leaders persuaded the crowd to have Barabbas released and Jesus executed. Between the dream telling him to have nothing to do with Jesus, and now the crowds demanding His execution, Pilate found himself to be in a difficult situation. Verse 21 sheds some light on Pilate’s indecisive character by asking the crowd: “Which of the two do you want me to release?” The crowd responded by wanting Barabbas released and cried out “Crucify Him” in regard to Jesus. Recognizing a Jewish custom to proclaim his innocence of the situation, Pilate then washed his hands in front of the crowd. He told the crowd in verse 24: “I am innocent of this man’s blood...It is your responsibility.” Pilate then released Barabbas, had Jesus flogged and then sent away to be crucified.

Key take-aways from the Sermon

- This service is both known as “Palm Sunday” as well as “Passion Sunday.” Even while we wave our palms in celebration, we know where all of this is headed. On Monday, Jesus is cleansed the Temple, on Thursday He’ll be betrayed with a kiss and then taken to Caiaphas the High Priest and Pilate.
- The Jews, under occupation, have no authority to adjudicate civil matters, but they can apply pressure to influence the verdict. So the Jewish leaders bring Jesus to the Roman governor, Pilate.
- Pilate was no friend to the Jews and took delight in harassing the Jews. Luke 13 states that Pilate’s troops drew blood in the Temple courts and slaughtered innocent people. This incident drew great criticism and left him in a continual state of self-preservation. Politically speaking, we often become too concerned with self-preservation that those we are called to serve!
- Jesus remained silent during His trial, which amazed Pilate (Matt 27:13-14)!
- When it comes to trial, when a defendant is too quiet, we usually think he/she is guilty. The church, however, sees Jesus’ silence as the fulfillment of Scripture (Isaiah 53).
- Reflecting on the tragedy of the Covenant School shooting, there was a prayer vigil the evening of the tragedy. Moments like this call for a time to weep and pray, before we begin to explain the situation, because prayer is a disciple’s *first response*. It is not a *substitute* for action but a *prerequisite* for action. It grounds us before we take action. Intercession must give way to interaction!
- In Jesus’ prayer at Gethsemane on Maundy Thursday, His prayer does not lead Him to avoid to the cross but to embrace it.
- There comes a time when “do-nothing” hands have blood on them, and no amount of hand washing will cleanse do-nothing hands (see Matthew 18:6). We must avoid getting caught up in groupthink and embrace “God-think”.
- Pilate sensed Jesus was innocent but could not risk his position. He found a way out of this by applying a tradition used during Passover to give the people a choice of releasing a prisoner. They chose Barabbas and then Pilate washed his hands of the situation.

- Father Maximillian Kolbe was a Polish priest during WWII that was convicted and sent to Auschwitz concentration camp. One night, a man escaped from the concentration camp but was caught by the camp guard. The punishment was for 10 men to be sentenced to “starvation bunker” and left to die in it. Father Kolbe switched places with a man who had a family and was put into the bunker. To the amazement of those there, they heard prayer, singing and praise coming from the bunker...right up to the end. The man Father Kolbe replaced was eventually released and lived a long life, always sharing the story of the man who saved him and died in his place.
- We know a Man who has done that for you and for me. We must spend the rest of our lives telling others about Him. It is not enough to just tell...we must do, as He has done for us for the sake of others. When we do, the world we see and know the real Jesus...and our swords may even be beat into ploughshares!

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- What are your thoughts regarding Jesus’ trial? Why did He respond the way that He did? Why was Jesus so silent?
- What is the significance of “He’s calling Elijah” in verse 47?
- What is the significance of the unusual events that surrounded Jesus’ death on the cross?
- Regarding what Rev. Dr. Chappell said about gun violence, how can we turn from beginning with prayer to action? How do we turn from groupthink to “God-think”?

