

## ***Jesus, Barabbas, and Pilate***

### **Opening Prayer:**

The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?

When evildoers assail me  
to devour my flesh –  
my adversaries and foes –  
they shall stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear;  
though war rise up against me,  
yet I will be confident...

Teach me your way; O Lord,  
and lead me on a level path  
because of my enemies.

Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,  
for false witnesses have risen against me,  
and they are breathing out violence.

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord  
in the land of the living.

Wait for the Lord;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the Lord!

*(Psalm 27:1-3, 11-14)*

### **Scripture Reading:**

Mark 15:1-15

Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

"Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate.

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of."

But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

"Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

"What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.

"Crucify him!" they shouted.

"Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

#### **Video Presentation – Session 4 “Jesus, Barabbas, and Pilate”**

##### *Key Insights:*

- ✓ The Via Dolorosa, or the Way of Suffering, marks the steps of Jesus from his condemnation before Pilate to his burial.
- ✓ The Stations of the Cross, developed by the Franciscans in the fourteenth century, is a devotional journal of fourteen steps, allowing pilgrims to retrace Jesus’ journey along the way of Suffering.
- ✓ Pilate gave the crowd a choice between Barabbas and his call to take up arms and Jesus of Nazareth and his call to love. The crowd chose violence.
- ✓ Imagine the sound echoing off the stone pavement, “Crucify him!”

##### *Questions for Discussion:*

1. Why do you think early Christians developed devotional exercises such as the Stations of the Cross? What can you imagine feeling as you followed behind someone carrying a cross along the Via Dolorosa?
2. In what ways are we still presented with the opportunity to confront our culture by choosing the way of love (Jesus) or the way of violence (Barabbas)?

3. If you had been at Jesus' trial, which character would you most likely identify with: Pilate? the crowd? Barabbas?

**Book Discussion:**

As he had at the trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus remained virtually silent before Pilate, who was astounded at his unwillingness to defend himself. Pilate knew the chief priests were accusing Jesus out of envy – Jesus was becoming more popular than they were, and their fear and insecurity drove their hatred – but why, he wondered, wasn't Jesus defending himself? He was charged with claiming to be king of the Jews, a capital offense. Caesar was king of the Jews now, and claiming that title was a sign of rebellion. When Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus gave a short and cryptic answer: "You say so." Jesus might have been saying, "Yes, of course, I am." He might have meant simply, "You have spoken, and I am not going to disagree with you." But he did not elaborate. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus did not say another word to Pilate. And so, Pilate must have wondered, "Why isn't he speaking?" (pg. 63)

- Why do you think the Synoptic Gospels show Jesus choosing not to speak in defense of himself?

Jesus was offering himself as a sacrificial lamb for the sins of the world. His death, Christians believe, was redemptive. It was purposeful. Jesus did not die a disillusioned prophet. He was not simply a great teacher put to death by the Romans. He chose to go to Jerusalem, anticipating and even predicting to his disciples his death. Christians believe that the death was the vehicle by which God saved the world...

Theologians have long wrestled with how we are to understand the doctrine of the Atonement – that is, our reconciliation with God through Jesus' death on a cross. Most thoughtful people wrestle with the question. It is difficult for us to comprehend fully at first glance how the death of Jesus brings about our salvation; it is something of an enigma. (pgs.64-65)

- How do you explain the connection between Jesus' suffering and the world's salvation? What about the doctrine(s) of the Atonement do you struggle to comprehend?

Matthew makes clear the crowd was being given a choice between two messianic figures. If you picture yourself as part of that crowd, which one do you pick? One is going to lead by force; throw out the Romans; reclaim your tax money, wealth, and prosperity; and restore the strength of the Jewish kingdom. The other's leadership involves loving these same oppressors, serving them as they dwell among you, doubling the service they demand of you....

Jesus asks us to choose his way over the way of Barabbas; but I also know that while many admire Jesus, they feel safer with, and prefer, Barabbas. That was the choice Pilate gave the crowd two thousand years ago: the popular revolutionary Barabbas, who would change the world through power, or Jesus, who would change the world through sacrificial love. The crowd shouted, “Release Barabbas for us!”

(Luke 23:18) Had you been standing there that day, whom would you have chosen? (pgs. 72-74)

- Considering our world today, what kind of messiah would people choose? Whom would you choose? Why?

### **Wrapping Up:**

Imagine that you are a criminal, guilty of murder and sedition. You have just been set free because someone you have never met is about to be crucified in your place. What are you thinking? What will you do next?

### **Closing Prayer:**

And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:10-11)

## For Further Study

### Bible Study and Discussion

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

- The Gospels seem to suggest that Jesus saw a connection between his suffering and Isaiah's vision of the "suffering servant." And as Adam Hamilton mentions in the book (pg. 64), the early church also made that connection. Read the fourth Servant Song, that begins with Isaiah 52:13, and reflect on how those words support or give meaning to the story of Jesus' suffering.

John 18:28-38

- Compare Jesus' response to Pilate in John's account with Jesus' near silence in the Synoptic accounts.