

"Sentenced to the Cross"—John 19:12-16

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "Sentenced to the Cross", is John 19:12-16 → *From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" They cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." So he delivered Him over to them to be crucified. This is the text.*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

The court is reconvened after a long consideration of evidence presented for weeks. The judge takes his place on the bench while silence falls over the courtroom and the ears of everyone are attentive, anticipating the pronouncement of a verdict. The pronouncement of the verdict is accompanied by the sharp sound of the gavel hitting the desk.

“I find the defendant guilty as charged,” says the judge. While the hearts of some in the courtroom sink in disappointment others are joyful. To say the least, it is an atmosphere mixed with anger and relief.

If one has not experienced the due process of justice at work personally in a courtroom it is possible that he may have an idea of it from depictions in the media and on TV. Scripture gives us a very different picture of Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin and sentencing before Pilate. Clearly justice is **not** the desired result in these two events . . . or is it?

Our text records Pilate at the point of sentencing Jesus to death at the request of *the Jews*. Earlier the Sanhedrin had Jesus arrested and during the night ran Him through a so-called “trial” which was a blatant mockery of justice. Matthew 26:59-60 says *the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put Him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward*. It was a trial turned upside down. The verdict had already been made. They just had to figure out how to justify their verdict. I guess it’s no different than our self-righteous judgments we make in life. The verdict is already made in our minds. We just need to justify why we are right.

Once the whole council of the Sanhedrin came to the conclusion that He was worthy of death, they mistreated Him and sent Him to Pilate for

sentencing. (cf. Matthew 26:57-26:2) However, Pilate found himself “between a rock and a hard place.” Throughout this “trial” of Jesus Pilate kept coming to the same conclusion—he found *no guilt in Him* (cf. John 19:4,6) Therefore our text says that he *sought to release Him*. (cf. verse 12) As the interaction progressed in this trial it appears his desire to release Jesus was overshadowed by his desire to remain in “good standing” with the mob. This may be why he was seeking their consent to let Jesus go.

Even with his desire to let Jesus go he could not ignore their accusations expressed in verse 12 of our text: *If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar*. We know from extra-Biblical sources that political pressure was pushing Pilate from other directions as well. Aside from Caesar’s concern with his controlling the Zealots and others who wanted to deliver the Jews from Roman oppression by rebellion and force, he received pressure from the high priest to deal with this “Jesus problem” in a way favorable to the high priest’s agenda. Thus, Pilate made the choice to sentence Jesus to death on a cross. (cf. verse 16)

His decision shows that Pilate was looking out for his own interests at the expense of the truth of the situation before him. No matter what label one may put on it, such as situational ethics or secular humanism, it is still exchanging *the truth about God for a lie* leading to idolatry. (cf. Romans 1:25)

However, the question still remains about this sentencing: Was this choice made on the basis of Pilate's power or on the basis of God's plan? When Jesus refused to answer Pilate's interrogation he had told Jesus in John 19:10-11 → *You will not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You and authority to crucify You?* From Pilate's perspective, Jesus' destiny rested in the power of his sentencing. It is likely Jesus' reply made no sense to Pilate when He said, *You would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given you from above.* What would "from above" mean to Pilate? The "gods?" Caesar, who was above him in the "chain of command?" Some phantom being in whom the Jews believed?

The preaching of the prophets and apostles reflect that *it was the will of the LORD to crush Him*; that He was *delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God*; that it happened according to what God's *hand and . . . plan had predestined to take place.* (cf. Isaiah 53:10; Acts 2:23; 4:28) In the midst of the unjust sentencing of Jesus to death on a cross Yahweh made the choice to pronounce His sentence of "guilty" as well. His Son was "guilty" of . . . your sin? 2 Corinthians 5:21 says God *made Him to be sin Who knew no sin, **so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.*** This is much more than simply "poetic justice." God has made His choice and brought about His just sentence in our lives. You are declared "not guilty" because Jesus

took all that guilt upon Himself for you!

So . . . what is your response to His choice? Unfortunately many make the choice of those in our text who shouted, *Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!* Such a choice to reject God's plan for you in Jesus Christ has very serious eternal consequences according to John 3:36 → *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.* In effect, such a person judges himself unworthy of eternal life in unbelief.

(cf. Acts 13:46)

This is not in accord with God's choice. By God's sentencing Jesus to the cross through the processes established under the direction of Pilate and the Jewish leaders, God brought about a sentence upon you and your sin! By delivering Jesus into the hands of these people God delivered you from sinful rejection of Him to forgiveness, new life and salvation! Along with the post- Pentecost believers, you have received the Holy Spirit through baptism and His Word daily to recognize that He *was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.* As a result the verdict is in, the sentencing has been accomplished and the choice is clear—confess your sin and your need for the Savior as you make choices **for Him** everyday under His power and grace!

The heavenly court is convened after a long consideration of evidence presented. Judge Yahweh takes His place on the bench while

you sit in your seat in fear, waiting to here the verdict on your sins. He raises the gavel ready to pronounce the verdict on your sin. At that moment your Defense Attorney says, “Your Honor, may I approach the bench?” Approaching the bench He leans over with nail scarred hands and says, “Your Honor, I died for this defendant.” As the gavel comes down to produce its sharp sound while hitting the desk the Judge says, “I find the defendant not guilty.” In the midst of relief and joy you can do no other than humbly say, “Thank You Jesus! Hallelujah!” Amen.

*My little children, I am writing these things to you
so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin,
we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

*He is the propitiation for our sins,
and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

(1 John 2:1-2)

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