

of Christ really means! Jesus took Barabbas' place. He took ours, too.

- Pilate's clever political plan has failed. Jesus has been denied justice from Pilate a second time.

2.5 Cries of the crowd to 'crucify' Jesus (Matthew 27:22-26)

- 'What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' Pilate asked. They all answered, 'Crucify him!' 'Why? What crime has he committed?' asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him!' (Matthew 27:22-23)
- It wasn't just the chief priests and Pharisees any more. They all answered, 'Crucify him!' And this was the same crowd who, less than a week earlier, had been celebrating Jesus' entry into Jerusalem with cries of 'Hosanna!' and scenes of delirious joy.
- The trouble with a crowd is that it is often like that, vacillating and fickle.
- Pilate denies Jesus justice for a third time. Like many a leader before and after him and unfortunately like many of us, Pilate acquiesces to the 'crowd' rather than defending the 'individual.'
- Jesus Barabbas is released and Jesus the Messiah is sent to the cross: 'Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.' (Matthew 27:26)
- How could they have done that, we ask. Particularly in the heat of the moment when they say, blame us. Let his death be on us: *All the people answered, 'His blood is on us and on our children!'* (Matthew 27:25)
- This verse has been grossly misunderstood. For centuries it has been the supposed justification for anti-semitism. But what does Matthew say here. He records the cry of 'rent-a-crowd' which the Jewish authorities had brought with them into the praetorium. He does not say that the Jewish nation killed Jesus, its Messiah. The Jewish nation did not. This is not an anti-semitic verse or an anti-semitic Gospel. There is no trace of hatred against those who nailed Jesus to the cross. For it was not the Jews who crucified Jesus. If we listen to Matthew carefully, we are all involved! It was the refusal of the human heart to respond to the King proclaiming the kingdom that led to Jesus' death. In that refusal all sinful humanity is implicated. On a political level, it was not the Jews but the Gentile Romans who executed Jesus, and Matthew makes that perfectly plain.

2.6 Conclusion

- Pilate has gone down in history as the man who 'washed his hands' and denied Jesus justice three times. He was convinced of Jesus' innocence, as was his wife. A desire to win favour with the Emperor, the Jewish authorities and the crowd led to the release of Jesus Barabbas, a convicted freedom fighter, and to the crucifixion of Jesus, the son of God, on the Cross.
- None of us can look at Pilate and say that we have not in many ways and on multiple occasions washed our own hands of people and situations and have followed the crowd rather than the word of God.

3. Questions to consider at home

3.1 Why do the Jewish authorities and 'rent-a-crowd' want Jesus crucified?

3.2 Why does Pilate 'wash his hands'?

3.3 Why is the release of Jesus Barabbas so ironic?

3.4 Where does the blame fall for the death of Jesus?

3.5 Are you or your own church 'washing your hands' of certain people and situations?

Matthew Street 17th September 2023



The St J's Group

Matthew 27:11-26 - 'Washing his hands'

Passage, Talk Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these talk notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during this week to consider the questions below.

1. Talk Passage – Matthew 27:11-26

11 Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 'You have said so,' Jesus replied.

12 When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. **13** Then Pilate asked him, 'Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?'

14 But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge – to the great amazement of the governor.

15 Now it was the governor's custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. **16** At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas.

17 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?'

18 For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.

19 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.'

20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

21 'Which of the two do you want me to release to you?' asked the governor. 'Barabbas,' they answered.

22 'What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' Pilate asked. They all answered, 'Crucify him!'

23 'Why? What crime has he committed?' asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him!'

24 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!'

25 All the people answered, 'His blood is on us and on our children!' **26** Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.



2. Talk Notes

2.1 Introduction

- 'Pilate took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd.' (Matthew 27:24b)

What are the things and situations that we have 'washed our hands' of:

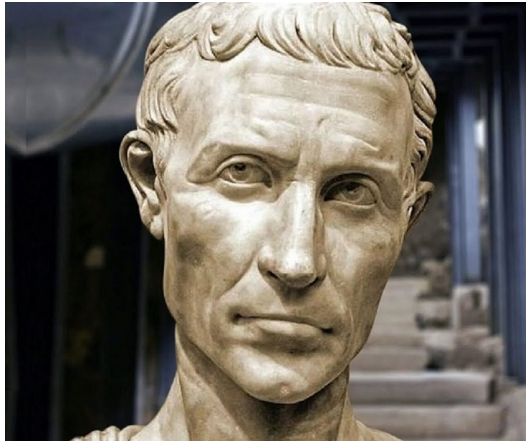
- Who are the people we have given up on?
- What are the relationships we are no longer investing in prayer?
- What are the situations we have walked away from because they have become too difficult or too painful to deal with?

- How often have we agreed with the 'crowd' rather than standing up for the 'individual'?

- Pilate knows, and his wife confirms via a special message: *'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man'* (Matthew 27:19b), that Jesus is innocent of the accusations being made against him. Instead of running with his conscience and doing the right thing Pilate fails to face down the crowd and the Jewish authorities and ends up going down in history as the man who *'washed his hands.'* How often have we done the same thing?
- Pilate, like Peter, denies Jesus justice three times:
 - Firstly following Pilate's own cross examination of Jesus: Matthew 27:11-14.
 - Secondly following the choice of Jesus Barabbas: Matthew 27:15-21
 - Thirdly following the cries of the crowd to 'crucify' Jesus: Matthew 27:22-26

2.2 Background and context

- In AD 26 the Roman Emperor Tiberius appointed Pontius Pilate prefect of the Roman provinces of Judaea, Samaria and Idumaea, although Pilate is best known for his leadership of Judaea.
- It was normal for a prefect to serve a three year term but Pilate served as the fifth Roman procurator for 10 years from AD 26 to 36.
- Claudia Procula, his wife, was the illegitimate daughter of Claudia, the Emperor Tiberius third wife, and so she was a grand-daughter of Augustus. She was therefore much better connected than her husband, and it may be that it was due to her that he gained his appointment as prefect of the Roman provinces of Judaea, Samaria and Idumaea
- We know a great deal about Pontius Pilate from the historians Philo and Josephus who describe Pilate as both weak and cruel, who was hated for the murders he continually perpetrated on untried people. He enjoyed the reputation of being corrupt and grossly inhumane, and he had a total lack of sympathy with the Jewish people and their sensitivities.
- As a Roman prefect, his duties included such mundane tasks as tax collection and managing construction projects, but his most crucial responsibility was that of maintaining law and order which he did by any means necessary including brute force.
- As procurator Pontius Pilate was also granted the power of a supreme judge, which meant that he had the sole authority to order a criminal's execution and this is why Jesus is brought to Pilate in the early hours of Good Friday.
- The Jewish authorities have already tried Jesus at an informal (and illegal, since it was after nightfall) gathering of the Sanhedrin: The high priest said to Jesus, *'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.'* *'You have said so,' Jesus replied. 'But I say to all of you: from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.'* *'Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?'* *'He is worthy of death,' they answered.'* (Matthew 26:63b -66)



2.3 Cross examination of Jesus (Matthew 27:11-14)

- The Jewish leaders accused Jesus of three crimes: *'We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.'* (Luke 23:2)
- These were definitely political charges, the kind that a Roman procurator could handle. Pilate focuses on the third charge that Jesus claimed to be a king because this was a definite threat to Rome. If he could deal with this "revolutionary" properly, Pilate could please the Jews and impress the Emperor at the same time.
- *'Are you the king of the Jews?'* (Matthew 27:11) Pilate asks. Jesus gives him a clear reply: *'It is as you say.'* (Matthew 27:11)
- In John's gospel, Jesus then asks Pilate a question about his question: *'Is that your own idea,' Jesus asked, 'or did others talk to you about me?'* *'Am I a Jew?'* Pilate replied. *'Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?'* Jesus said, *'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.'* *'You are a king, then!'* said Pilate. *'Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.'* (John 18:34-37)
- Jesus explains to Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world, that He had no armies and that His followers did not fight. Rather, His kingdom was a reign of truth.
- This conversation clearly convinces Pilate that Jesus was not a dangerous revolutionary. *'I find no basis for a charge against him'* (John 18:38) was Pilate's decision.
- Pilate could at this stage have dismissed Jesus and let him go but the politician inside of him gets the upper hand and rather than confronting the Jewish authorities he comes up with a scheme to appease them and so Pilate begins the journey of 'washing his hands' of the situation.

2.4 Choice of Jesus Barabbas (Matthew 27:15-21)

- Matthew, Mark and John tell us that at the Feast of Passover one prisoner was released, as a goodwill gesture. This tactic was classic Pilate. He used it year after year as a way to ingratiate himself with the Jews, who absolutely hated him: *'Now it was the governor's custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a well-known 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?'* (Matthew 27:15-17)
- Pilate is hoping that the crowds will seek the release of Jesus the Messiah, not Jesus Barabbas. To his utter shock and amazement they seek the release of Jesus Barabbas: *'Which of the two do you want me to release to you?' asked the governor. 'Barabbas,' they answered.* (Matthew 27:22)
- This incident is full of irony. The one who refused to take arms as a freedom fighter was crucified on the cross of Barabbas, the freedom fighter. Not only that: the name 'Barabbas' means 'son of the father', so there are now two 'sons of the father' in the centre of the stage.
- Here stood two 'sons of the father'; two men called Jesus which means 'God to the rescue'. One pillaged and killed. The other loved and suffered. The crowd were called to make a choice between the two ideals of living God's way or their own. Each and everyone of us is still called to make this choice on a daily basis.
- On that Good Friday, the innocent 'son of the father' ended up on the cross intended for the other. The guilty man walked away free. An amazing picture of what the cross