



St. Paul Evangelical Community Church (SPECC)

Worship Address : Cerritos High School Auditorium
12500 E. 183rd St., Cerritos, CA 90703
(Enter at Bloomfield, across Heritage Park)

Mailing Address : 11428 E. Artesia Blvd. # 4 ; Artesia, CA 90701
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May 24, 2009

Theme: The King of the Jews

Text: Matthew 27:11-26

For more than a few months now we have been studying the greatest story ever told. It is the story about the True God who loved the world so much that he sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins. Paul said of Jesus that He made a "good confession" before Pontius Pilate. Jesus set the example for all believers down through history. He remained faithful to His Father's will, even though he was facing one of the most horrific and painful deaths imaginable. Jesus made a good confession in that he simply told the truth about who He was. The martyrs who followed Jesus to their deaths would do the same. They would tell the truth about who they were—followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus now stands before the secular ruler of Rome as the leaders of the Jews prepare to hand on of their own over to the Gentiles. Pilate has one question for Jesus: "Are you the King of the Jews?" Luke helps us understand where Pilate got such an idea. Luke tells us that the Jewish leadership began to accuse Him saying, "We have found this fellow subverting our nation. He opposes paying taxes to Caesar, and claims to be the Messiah, a King." These were of course, false charges. The Jewish leadership revealed their complete and total spiritual bankruptcy. The Jewish leadership simply lied about Jesus' teaching. He had endorsed paying taxes to Caesar. As far as being a King was concerned, Jesus admitted that he was the King of the Jews, but not in the way they expected. As John wrote in His Gospel, "The light shined in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."

Pilate had sense enough to detect the fact that the Jewish leadership had handed Jesus over to him because of envy. Pilate had a custom, during the Passover, of releasing a prisoner of the crowd's choosing. He wants to release Jesus so he asks the crowd that had gathered who he should release: Should he release Barabbas? Or should he release Jesus who is called Christ? There is a great irony in the text at this point. Barabbas' name means, "son of the father." The Jews had put Jesus on trial but now Pilate puts them on trial. Who would they choose which son of whose father would they choose. Would they choose Barabbas, who was a guerilla revolutionary? Or would they choose Jesus? Would they choose the man of war or the man of peace? History tells us that they chose the man of war and the way of war and revolted against Rome from 63-70 AD. They were crushed as a nation by the Roman general Titus, who later became Caesar, and his armies.

Matthew tells us that the chief priests and the elders of the people persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas instead of Jesus. This behavior shows that they were spiritually unskilled and ill-prepared to be the spiritual leaders of Israel. But they were skilled in the



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art of manipulation and politics. It is not difficult to see how they could have persuaded the crowd. Barabbas was no mere criminal. Mark tells us that he was a guerilla warrior—a rebel against Rome. This would have made him popular with the people. He was not afraid to oppose mighty Rome with force. Jesus, on the other hand, had instructed his disciples to love their enemies and had endorsed the payment of taxes to Rome.

It is clear that Matthew identifies the Jewish religious leaders of his day as being the primary ones who carry the responsibility for Jesus' crucifixion. But this is not an example of anti-Semitism. Matthew is a Jew who is writing for Jews. It is tragic that in the history of Christianity, people who were Christians in name, at least, have been responsible for blaming all Jews for Jesus' crucifixion. This is tragic and unspiritual foolishness. We should no more hold all Jews to be responsible for Jesus' death than we should hold all Italians responsible for Jesus' death. The reality is that we are all responsible for Jesus' death. It was our sin that required Jesus' death on the cross.

Pilate is on trial here along with the Jews. He receives a message of warning from his wife who had had a nightmare about Jesus. She warns him to have nothing to do with that "righteous" or "just man." Pilate is now faced with a choice: The crowds have asked for Barabbas, but this doesn't mean that he is forced to crucify Jesus. He could have simply put Him in prison. Pilate then takes a foolish step which shows that he is not a man of character: He asks the crowds what to do with Jesus. Of course they call out for his crucifixion. Jesus had always had compassion for the crowds, but in this moment they have no compassion for Him. In fact the crowds are on the verge of starting a riot. Pilate performs a symbolic act by which he tries to release himself from responsibility for Jesus' death. He says as much to the crowds who speak without thinking: They say, "Let his blood be upon us and upon our children!"

This was a dangerous thing to say. They had rejected the Man who had come to them with a message of peace. In the years to follow they would begin to listen more intently to those voices who were calling out for an armed rebellion against Rome. The Jews revolted in 63 AD and were crushed by the Romans in 70 AD. Their words came true in a way that they did not want or expect.

But Pilate's question to the crowds is a question that is placed before all of us. "What shall I do then, with Jesus, who is called 'Christ?'" It is a question that is placed before believers as well as unbelievers. Pilate speaks for Jesus who calls unbelievers to make a decision either for or against Him. Pilate speaks for Jesus who speaks to all believers urging them to deny themselves and to take up the cross daily and follow Him. Where is Jesus asking you to follow Him today?