

# The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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## CHAPTER SEVENTY

### MATTHEW 27:1-26

THE first two verses of this chapter link its narrative to that of the preceding one. We have considered the first trial scene, that travesty of justice; the gathering of the Sanhedrim in the night, which was in itself illegal according to their own law. That is revealed in the action which Matthew so briefly chronicles in these two first verses; **“When the morning was come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death.”**

That is they met in the morning and took counsel as to how they should carry out the decision of the night, in order to be technically within the law. Their decision was that they would so act as to compel the Roman power to be the instrument of their own base decision; so they **“bound Him, . . . led Him away, and delivered Him up to Pontius Pilate the governor.”**

The outstanding figures in the section are those of the King Himself, Judas and Pilate.

First of all our eyes are fixed upon the King.

- Standing in the presence of Pilate, He made His claim to be the King of the Jews.
- On solemn oath, in the presence of the Sanhedrim in the night, He claimed to be the Son of God, the Messiah.
- Now once again before Pilate the question was asked, not with the same formality, but it was the question of the judge directly spoken to the prisoner; **“Art Thou the King of the Jews?”**

And again quietly, with little formality, and yet as clearly as in the night, He answered the inquiry of the Procurator. **“Thou sayest.”** That is to say, What thou sayest is so, I am the King of the Jews.

Then immediately Pilate turned aside from his true line of action as a dispassionate judge, and reminded the Prisoner of the clamour of these priests.

And Christ answered nothing.

Christ's sense of true judicial procedure was far finer than Pilate's. He would answer His judge, but He had no answer for clamour, no answer for those men who were there for the set purpose of encompassing His death. The foregone conclusion of His opponents made Him silent.

Let us now look at the two men here coming into contact with Christ. In each case we see the most disastrous failure.

This is the final picture of Judas. What are the things that are impressed upon our mind as we look at him?

- First, a too late repentance;
- Secondly, a too late restitution, the flinging back of the thirty pieces of silver;
- Finally, an appalling retribution coming upon him by his own hand.

Judas appears in this trial scene as one of the band of Christ's own disciples, one of the inner circle. In following this Gospel, we have seen vast multitudes crowding about Him, the rulers and those in authority deeply interested in Him. We have also seen how they gradually fell away, the rulers first, and then the multitudes, until He slowly and solemnly proceeded to the place He occupied in the awful hour of His passion, absolutely alone so far as human friendship was concerned.

Judas had been His companion along the highway of His public ministry. He had sat at the table with Him, and had heard those intimate and private conversations. He had been one of the inner circle of souls, loyal to Him, at least by confession and profession. This man was the traitor in the camp, the betrayer of our Lord from the inner circle to the outer circle; as in turn, they of His own nationality became His betrayers to that yet wider circle of Roman power. So by a process of betrayal from the inner circle outward, our Lord was handed over; by a member of His own disciples to the foes plotting for His own life; and by the members of His own nation to the nation without, which cared nothing for Him, but wholly for themselves.

Many brilliant and interesting attempts have been made to redeem Judas from obloquy, but let us be content to abide by his own conception of what he had done "**I have sinned.**" Not, I have blundered, or have been mistaken, or foolish, or wrong; not, I have attempted to hurry this Messiah to declare Himself, but, "**I have sinned.**"

As we look at Judas in that terrible picture, we see a man filled with terror, the terror of a lost soul; the sense of sin, and the dread of its issue. Not regret, not the sense of sin with desire to escape it, but the sense of sin with desire to escape the issue of it.

That is not the repentance that brings a man to God. If a man simply repents of sin, by attempting to escape its issue, he knows nothing of repentance in the true sense of the word. Repentance which would be glad to bear the fire of hell if it would purge from sin, is the repentance that works salvation.

His restitution was also too late. It was a dramatic scene.

The priests were moving across the courtyard, from the place where they had met in the palace of the high priest to the palace of the Procurator. Just over the wall were the Temple courts; and suddenly this man confronted the procession of priests, with Jesus in the midst, and cried to them, "**I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood.**"

Mark the brutality of the answer, “**What is that to us? See thou to it;**” you made your bargain, abide by it! Then, realizing the whole meaning of the situation, Judas took those thirty pieces of silver he had not spent one of them, what he got he did not gain, a man never does when he is selling Christ and flung them over into the Temple enclosure. An awful revelation of the illumination of a soul too late! Then he hurried away and hanged himself. Thus the one traitor in the inner circle of Christ’s Kingdom, became his own executioner. If we would know the difference between true repentance and false, let us go back to the story of Peter, and put the statement there into comparison with the statement here.

Peter had basely denied Him; but mark the ending of the two stories.

- Of Peter it is written, “**He went out and wept bitterly.**”
- Of Judas it is written, “**He went away and hanged himself.**”

In the one case, we have the man repentant, sorry for the actual sin, and turning from it, desiring to escape from the wrong done. In the other case we have a man, desiring to escape the consequences of his sin, by his own act plunging himself into them.

Now let us look at the high priests, and if it be possible, calmly. They gathered up those thirty pieces of silver. Notice their religious conscience.

In the midst of the greatest travesty of justice that the world has ever seen, themselves the inspirers and instigators of the foul deed, the darkest sin ever committed, they said “**It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.**” What shall we do with them? We will endeavor to cleanse this money which has been cast into the Temple courts by putting it to charitable uses! We will buy the potter’s field, and we will make it the place to bury strangers in.

How often men attempt to cleanse money by putting it to charitable uses. Mark the irony of the whole situation, how the people named the thing correctly, even when the priests tried to hide it. The priests said, A field to bury strangers in. The people said, The field of blood! Thus, all unintentionally, they sent down through all the years the right naming of the thing they had done, “**The field of blood.**”

The story of Pilate is a story of conscience; and there are these distinct movements in the process:

- First conscience startled;
- Then conscience struggling;
- Then conscience compromising;
- Finally, conscience drugged, silenced!

The final revelation of the study is that the man who governs his life simply by conscience, is likely to ruin his life.

His conscience was startled by the very presence of Jesus. There would seem to be no other explanation. Pilate was a man never popular, even among his own friends; hard, cold, dispassionate, used to scenes of blood; a man who in all likelihood had risen from the rank of a slave, not immediately, but by succession.

The man who rises, without the grace of God, always becomes the greatest despot, when he is given power. But when the priests came to him, bearing that Prisoner, he was a startled man. No such prisoner had stood before him up to that moment. Pilate embodied Roman authority; but here was a Prisoner at the bar, Who immediately became the Judge, while the judge became the prisoner. Pilate felt the influence of His stately and quiet affirmation of Kingship. **“Art Thou the King of the Jews?”** which meant to say, Thou art claiming to be the King of the Jews; it is an absurd position; settle it at once by saying that Thou art not! But instead of a denial, there was an affirmation. Pilate expected the Prisoner would wish to escape; he found the Prisoner had no desire to escape. Pilate himself would have given anything to escape. His conscience was aroused.

Then we see a man struggling with his conscience. His arguments for Jesus as against the priests, and that last suggestion supposed to be by himself a master-stroke of cleverness, prove this.

It was his custom to release a notable prisoner. Barabbas was a man guilty of robbery and murder, and yet a man making claims to free his people. Barabbas means son of the father; and is a title rather than a name. Some of the early commentators give the name as Jesus Barabbas. In all probability he had set up Messianic claims, on the low level of a material fight and robbery. Pilate saw the difference, and thought that surely these religious men, if driven to choice, would be bound to accept Jesus. So little did Pilate know of priestism! Which will you have, Jesus which is called Christ, or Barabbas?

Then there occurred an interval, in which the priests persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas; and, as John tells us, in the loneliness of an inner chamber, face to face with Christ, Pilate asked, **“What is truth?”**

The hidden interview over, the people were ready to answer; and Pilate came with his question, **“Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you?”** They replied, **“Barabbas.”** Then, perplexed, struggling with his conscience, Pilate said, **“What shall I do then with Jesus Who is called Christ?”** Again the answer came, quick and ready, priest-inspired, **“Let Him be crucified.”** And again Pilate asked, **“Why, what evil hath He done?”**

We see how now his conscience was struggling between obedience and expedience; struggling as to whether it would obey the deep conviction concerning the Man in front of him or listen to the clamour of these men, and secure his own position. He knew the subtlety of the priests, he knew full well if he handed Jesus over to freedom, they would complain against him at Rome, that he had committed high treason against Caesar.

Then followed the washing of his hands in water. Judas, a frenzied soul, went back and faced the high priests and said, **“I have betrayed innocent blood.”** Now Pilate said, **“I am innocent of the blood of this just Man; see ye to it.”**

What next? Conscience drugged. **“Then . . . he had scourged Jesus . . . delivered him to be crucified.”**

Now once more we look back; and this story of Judas teaches us that there is an unpardonable sin.

There are many passages in the New Testament that speak of it, always with awful solemnity. What is it? Rejection of the Saviour.

If Judas, instead of confessing his sin to the high priest, had confessed it to Christ, he would have been pardoned there and then; if, instead of allowing an awful fear resulting from sin to drive him to self-destruction, he had flung himself upon the tender compassion of Jesus he would have been forgiven even then.

The unpardonable sin, and the only one for which Christ has no word, no look, no help, is the sin of deliberately, and willfully, and finally, rejecting Him, as Saviour.

As we look at Judas, we learn also that whatever price we put upon Christ we are likely to get for Him. It is an awful truth. We can sell Christ for our own price! The devil will take care of that!

F. Beard, of Chicago, in one of his wonderful cartoons, has a picture that would shock the sensibilities of some.

It is that of a man in his inner office, leaning on his desk, writing, and looking over his ledgers and books. Outside the door of that office stands the Christ, knocking, but the door is locked and there is no entrance for Him. Standing by the man is the devil not the devil of the Middle Ages, with horns and hoofs, but the cultured, refined, and insidious devil of the nineteenth century, who woos and wins with gold. And what is he doing? He is giving this man all that he asks, in order to keep Christ out. It is graphic, awful, and true! That is the devil's mission, to give men anything, in order to keep Christ out.

But there is a difference between getting and gaining.

The things a man gets when he sells Christ are not current in the eternities; and at the last, his soul passing out into the darkness, as did that of Judas, he will fling back the getting of years into the Temple, having lost Christ and the thirty pieces of silver.

We see the King in Pilate's hall arraigned. But Pilate was arraigned. Nineteen centuries have gone and the world knows it now. Not the high priests are jailors. He is the Jailor; He holds them in His right hand, and their eternal destinies depend upon Him. Not the Roman Procurator was judge.

He was a prisoner, and his question was more than he knew, **“What shall I do then with Jesus?”**

In that moment when Pilate released Barabbas, and gave Jesus to the Cross, the Roman kingdom was doomed in the economy of God. Presently the followers of Christ found their way to Rome.

A halting man, feeble in bodily appearance, came into Rome as a prisoner, and receiving into his own hired house all that came to him, he taught them the things concerning Jesus, Whom their Governor had given to the Cross. Thus Rome was shaken at the center; and its pagan power was broken by the coming of the King Pilate had flung out.

**~ end of chapter 70 ~**

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