



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 15: 1-15

Mark

"Christ Before Pilate"

TRANSCRIPT

The passage is Mark chapter 15. And if you have your Bibles, follow along with me as I read verses 1 through 15.

Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding , they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate. Pilate questioned Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him, "It is as you say." The chief priests began to accuse Him harshly. Then Pilate questioned Him again, saying, "Do You not answer? See how many charges they bring against You!" But Jesus made no further answer; so Pilate was astonished.

Now at the feast he used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested. The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection. The crowd went up and began asking him to do as he had been accustomed to do for them. Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead. Answering again, Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify Him!" But Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him!" Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time of study in it together. Shall we bow in a word of prayer?

[Prayer] Gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for the time we have again to come together and study the Scriptures, and we recognize, Father, that this is a great privilege, a privilege to open the Scriptures and to see what You have revealed to us about the most important events of history. As we consider this trial of our Lord that led to His crucifixion, and through that crucifixion, the purchase of our salvation, we pray that You would give us a clear understanding of the events that unfolded, the dangers that face men when they are unprepared, and the innocence of our Lord that qualified Him to be the savior. We commit this study to You and we ask that You would teach us and instruct us and give us the proper warnings and the proper incentives as we do that, that we might live lives that are pleasing to You, that when we are faced with crises, as Pilate was, for example, we might not make the wrong decisions, that we might not be guided by fear of men, that we would be guided by faith in the Scriptures and trust in You, and we pray that our lives and being lived in that way would be lived in a way that's pleasing to You, in a way that would bring honor to Your name.

We recognize, Father, that we will be strengthened in this way through our study of the Scriptures, and so we pray that You'd give us diligence in that not only on the Sunday morning, but we pray that You'd give us attentive minds as we look into the texts. But may that interest in the Scriptures continue throughout the week, throughout our lives, may we be men and women and children who are devoted to a study of the Word of God.

Bless our church in that way, and bless it whenever the Word of God is taught, we pray for the Sunday schools, the Sunday school teachers. We pray You'd bless them, bless them greatly as they unfold the Scriptures in the hour that follows. Bless us this evening as we come together to celebrate the Lord's supper and to reflect upon what He has done for us. Bless those who will stand and speak, and we pray that they would be edifying. And bless our hearts through their ministry.

We pray, Father, for our congregation in other ways as well. We look at the bulletin and we are reminded that there are many who are sick, many who are in need. We pray that You would bless and pray that You'd give recovery. We pray that You'd

give strength both physically and spiritually. We pray for those who are in need financially, that You would provide for them. We pray for those who are not in particular need financially, but who work and who labor. We pray for the men of this assembly, and for the women who have to work as well, and we pray that You'd give them strength and diligence. We pray that You'd make provision for them.

We pray, Lord, finally, for our nation, and we ask that You would bless it. Bless our leaders with wisdom. We pray that they would lead this land in difficult times wisely. And so, we pray that You would give wisdom to those who govern us, and we pray also Lord, and perhaps principally, for spiritual growth in this land. We pray that You'd bless us with revival. We pray that men and women would come to faith. We see a land that is in great need, a moral and a spiritual crisis that can only be resolved through Your grace and Your intervention. We pray for that. We pray that You would use us wherever we are, in this city, or throughout the state, throughout the land, that You would use us to be instruments, to be means of that grace in the spread of the gospel. Bless us to that end now. Bless us as we sing our final hymn, that it would prepare our hearts for the ministry. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] This morning, our subject is Christ before Pilate, the second trial of Jesus. As you will remember, the Lord has been tried in the Jewish court of law before the great Sanhedrin, and He has been convicted of blasphemy when He confessed to being the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One. But now, things move into the Roman court of law. The reason for that was the Romans who governed the Jews had denied the Jewish court, the power to administer the death penalty. And since the Jewish leaders were determined to have Christ executed, they had to seek Rome's agreement in the verdict for the execution to occur.

They did have this problem, however: the same verdict couldn't be reached on the same charges. Blasphemy was not a crime that Rome would punish, not a crime that Rome even cared about. And so, the crime of high treason was substituted for it, a change that would certainly get the attention of the Roman government because this was a day in which insurrection was in the air. In fact, rebellions had been occurring throughout the first century. And so, that certainly would get the attention of the Roman government. Their decision, the decision of the Sanhedrin to charge the Lord

with treason is probably what Mark is referring to in verse 1 where he writes that "early in the morning, the priests, the elders and the scribes held a consultation." Probably the consultation was about changing the verdict, or rather, the charge that they had made against Him from that of blasphemy, which was necessary in their court of law, to come to a verdict that would call for execution, to this one of high treason, which would be necessary to get the same verdict from the Romans.

And so, they held a consultation. They came to this decision, and then around 3:00 in the morning, just before dawn, they bound Jesus and led Him away to Pilate. And so, we come now to the second trial of our Lord, an unusual situation. Perhaps we can say a unique situation. Walter Chandler writes in his book, "Trial of Jesus," "History records no other instance of a trial conducted before the courts of both heaven and earth, the court of God and the court of men. Under the law of Israel and the law of Rome. Before Caiaphas and Pilate as the representatives of these courts and administrators of these laws. And so, the Lord now will be tried in a second court of law; having been tried in the Jewish court, He is now tried in the Roman court. Having been tried before the Jewish people, it will now be a trial before the Gentiles. And in both courts of law, both Jewish and Gentile, justice would fail. Injustice would prevail, illustrating the ultimate failure of human justice and the guilt of all mankind in the death of Christ.

But in delivering up Christ to Pilate, the Lord's prophecy would be fulfilled, which He had made back in chapter 10 of Mark's gospel when He said the Son of Man will be delivered up to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will deliver Him up to the Gentiles.

In his book, "Wealth of Nations," Adam Smith wrote over 200 years ago of an invisible hand that guided the rich in the distribution of their wealth and income throughout society. Well, there is an invisible hand that is evident in these events as well, and it is the invisible hand of God Himself as He moves events providentially to bring about His will, to bring about His plan of salvation, to accomplish and fulfill the mission of His Son.

We see that behind the scenes, so to speak. We certainly see it. To say that doesn't relieve these men who are involved in this conspiracy and involved in this failure of Justice, it doesn't relieve them from any of their responsibility because all that they do in this event, they do freely. They chose freely to do it. But their actions

ultimately carry out God's plan of salvation in the sacrifice of His son. The innocent Son of God in exchange for guilty men. So we see God's hand in all of this, and yet we see guilty sinners carrying it out.

So, in fulfillment of our Lord's prophecy, He is taken to Pilate. Mark doesn't say who Pilate is. Doesn't even mention that he was the Roman governor. Evidently he assumes that we know that. We know a few things about Pilate from the secular record, from that which has been recorded about him outside of Scripture. He had been governor since AD 26. He came from Spain. Not a man of noble birth, but a very ambitious man, a man who served in the Roman legions in Germany and fought along the Rhine river, and afterward went to Rome to make his fortune. And while in Rome, he met and married Claudia Procula, the youngest daughter of Julia, who was the daughter of Caesar Augustus. And so, he married the granddaughter of Caesar. And by that marriage, became a man who was well-connected. And perhaps due to those connections he had by marriage, he gained the governorship of Judea.

There's some question as to how well Pilate did govern the Jewish people. He was clearly a man who was anti-Semitic. On more than one occasion, he callously challenged the religious sensibilities of the Jewish people. There are a number of occasions recorded about this in the secular record. Luke, however, does record one incidence in Luke chapter 13 and verse 1 where he writes that Pilate mingled the blood of certain Galileans with their sacrifices. That's about all he says. So really, left to guess as to what that occasion might've been. But it would certainly seem to suggest that during a time of worship, Pilate slew a number of Galileans in such a way that their blood was mingled with the sacrifices that they had made.

So, it was those kinds of actions that made Pilate a hated man among the Jewish people. He had a history of making bad decisions as governor. The challenges of governing Judea tested his character. And in so doing, they exposed something about his character. They showed him to be a man who was stubborn and a man who could be very cruel. But no incident ever challenged him like the one that he faced that morning when the Jewish leaders led Jesus to his door. It was a challenge that he had not anticipated, couldn't have anticipated it.

And of course, so many of the challenges that we face in life are challenges that we cannot anticipate. Unexpected crises can arise at any time. We don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. We don't know what we will face. We don't wake

up knowing what kind of difficulty that we will face during the day. And so, we must be prepared for that. We can't anticipate them, but we can prepare ourselves for them. And the only way to do that, the only way to be prepared for what is coming and yet unseen is to have a life that's grounded in a solid foundation. That takes a daily effort. Every day of our life, we must be grounding ourselves in the solid foundation of God's word. We'll say more about that as we look at the text.

Well, the crisis that Pilate faced at dawn with the appearance of our Lord was one, as I said, that he was not prepared to meet. It is the trial in which, as we have entitled this lesson, Christ stood before Pilate, but only in an historical sense did Christ stand before Pilate. Spiritually, it was Pilate who stood before Jesus. It was he who really was on trial that day, and the result would be that Pilate would be convicted of being a self-seeker, a man who feared men rather than God.

And yet, Pilate does not come off as a man completely without character. In fact there are things about him that you must admire as you study the texts. Almost from the beginning, he does everything in his power to get rid of this case. You see this when comparing the gospel accounts, all of the gospels together and looking at this trial. In John's account, for example, three times he pronounces the Lord to be innocent. He made attempts in the other gospels, as well as this one as we see, to free Christ, to subvert the Jewish leaders and to avoid a death sentence. Didn't want to crucify Christ. He wasn't indifferent toward His situation.

Now, in part, he did that because he was sensitive to justice. And of course, Rome is famous for its justice. We hear about the Greeks and what they contributed. They contributed culture to the Western world, and art, literature. The Romans are famous for contributing justice, a legal system, and handing that down to Western society. So he was a man brought up in that tradition and a man who was very sensitive to justice.

He didn't want to condemn an innocent man. And so that is, in part, the reason for his strong interest in releasing the Lord. But that's also an interest that he had in part because he had a disdain for the Jews. He had no desire to please them and to grant their request in respect to our Lord. But as much as he hated the Jews, he also feared them. Feared the possibility of what their influence might do to his career. And as we've seen by some of the things that have been mentioned, Luke's example being one in Luke 13:1. he had a number of strikes against him already. He didn't

need for the Jewish leaders to bring to the attention of Rome any other mistakes that he might make. So, he was very concerned about his career. And in the end, his career was more important than justice, and he would give in to their pressure and sacrifice Christ for his position.

He was a man who feared men rather than fearing God. And so they bring Jesus to Pilate, and Pilate begins to question Him. We read in verse 2 that he asks, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Now, Mark gives an abbreviated account of the trial. According to Luke, the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leaders, the Jewish court stated three charges against Him. They accused Him of misleading the nation, of forbidding the payment of taxes to Caesar, and the charge of claiming to be Christ, a king. And it was this third accusation that was of particular interest to Pilate, because the way they put that charge meant that He was the leader of a resistance movement, that He was guilty of sedition, of trying to overthrow Caesar.

And so Pilate asks: "Are You the King of the Jews?" And as a question, that emphasizes the word "You" in the Greek text, which suggests that Pilate was incredulous. Literally, it reads, "You are the king of the Jews?" He looks at our Lord and he doesn't see anything particularly regal about him. And evidently, felt it somewhat ridiculous as he looked at Him. He didn't appear to Pilate that he was any rival to Caesar. And if we can detect in that a sense of scorn as he looks at our Lord, and not being at all impressed with Him, that would change, and he would become very much impressed with the Lord as this trial unfolds. But as he looks at Him initially, he doesn't see anything particularly commendable about Him, anything particularly regal about Him.

So he asks this question: are You the king of the Jews? And to that question, Jesus answers, "It is as you say." Now John adds that the Lord explains the statement. He says, "My kingdom is not of this realm," meaning yes, Pilate, I am a king, but not the kind of king that they accuse Me of being.

The investigation that we see here is one that took place within the praetorium, or the palace of the governor. And following the initial examination, Pilate stepped outside onto the porch and told the Jews that he found no guilt in Him, even though the Lord says, "I am a king," he understands what He means, evidently, and he knows, to whatever degree he understands it, he knows at least that He's saying, "I'm not the kind of king that I've been accused of being," and he believes it.

Well, that brought forth a series of accusations by the chief priests. Mark writes that they accused Him harshly. And yet, through it all, the Lord remained silent. He refused to defend Himself, and Pilate was surprised by His response, and he questioned Him about that, and he asked Him: "Do you make no answer?" He was sure of the Lord's innocence, and evidently was hoping that He'd give some answers, and He would take on this trial Himself, and that He would answer them. And in so doing, He relieved Pilate of the burden of the case, but the Lord didn't do that. He stood there in silence. And Mark writes that His response astonished Pilate. He marveled at the Lord's control in the Lord's control in the face of this harsh criticism.

But it was a prophetic response. We've seen this before. We've seen this all through the trial of our Lord. He conducted Himself as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 in which Isaiah says that "He opened not His mouth." And He will continue to do that throughout these proceedings. It's a prophetic response, I say. It's a fulfillment of prophecy. We see that all the way through this passage, and that's why I say we can recognize in this an invisible hand, the hand of God moving and directing events. He was fulfilling that picture that's given to us by Isaiah. But at the same time, I think there's a practical reason for the Lord not opening His mouth and remaining silent. And that is that it would've been pointless to speak. It would've been pointless to defend Himself. Pilate knew that He was innocent. He's already declared Him to be innocent. He will continue to declare Him to be innocent.

So Pilate doesn't deserve an answer from the Lord. And of course, the Jewish leaders weren't interested in His defense. They knew that He was innocent, and they have been seeking to bring this innocent man into a position where He can be condemned and convicted. And so, there was nothing more that needed to be said or that would've been gained by being said. And so, He stood before Pilate just as He had stood before the Sanhedrin, in majestic silence. He mains His character in the midst of these harsh accusations.

There are times when silence is the best response, when rather than casting our pearls before swine, we should simply say nothing. And this, for our Lord, was such a time.

Now, Pilate was a shrewd man. I think he was a very intelligent man. He wouldn't have advanced as far as he had if he was not. He knew that the Lord was innocent, and he wanted to release Him. But at the same time, his fatal flaw was that

he lacked courage, lacked the courage to stand against the Jewish leaders and acquit the man whom they had judged guilty, and they were so anxious to have executed. And so, being a clever man, being an intelligent man, and not wanting to have the Lord executed, he tried to outwit these men with a series of ploys.

Luke tells us that when he learned that Jesus was from Galilee, he sent Him to Herod to be judged, since Herod was the king of that region. But when nothing came of that, he then tried to escape responsibility for this trial by taking advantage of a Jewish custom of releasing a prisoner during the Passover.

John records Pilate going out to the people and saying, "You have a custom that I should release someone for you at Passover." It was a custom that I'm sure Pilate hated, but one that he had observed, and one that this time he saw might work to his advantage, give him an opportunity to release Jesus without having to render a judgment. And so, confident that the people would choose to release an innocent man, he offered them Jesus or a man named Barabbas.

We know nothing of Barabbas other than what the gospels tell us. Legend has grown up around him, but the only reliable information that we have about Barabbas is that that's found here. And this alone really presents something of an interesting picture of him, a rather intriguing picture of him. His name, Barabbas, is Bar-Abba, which means son of Abba, or son of the father. It was a common surname among rabbinic families. And so, there is speculation that he may have been the son of a famous rabbi.

Some manuscripts in Matthew record the full name to be Jesus Barabbas, so it's possible that he had the first name of Jesus, though those texts are not very strong in the evidence. Matthew also describes him as a notorious prisoner, notorious because of his involvement in an insurrection that took place in Jerusalem. Literally, Mark calls it "the insurrection," which suggests that it was a rather famous insurrection that had occurred in the city in which Barabbas had participated, and in which he had committed murder.

So, he's a murderer. John tells us that he was also a robber. Evidently, by means of robbery, he and his band of men supported their group in their attempts at revolution. So, Barabbas was a robber, he was a murderer, he was a revolutionary, perhaps a member of the sect of the zealots who hated Roman occupation and worked to overthrow it. He was, we might say, a Jewish terrorist. Perhaps he had grown up,

as has been suggested, the son of a rabbi, was zealous for the law and the traditions, a man who was zealous for his nation's glory, and took up arms to fight for free Israel. Such a person, you can imagine, would've been very popular with many of the people of his day, and so many of those who had gathered at the praetorium on that Good Friday were probably supporters of Barabbas. They may not have even known that the Lord had been arrested; they weren't there to see His trial. They were there to seek amnesty for their man, Barabbas, according to this custom that had been carried out on the day of the Passover. And that's what they began asking for, the release of Barabbas.

This is where Pilate played his trump card. He asked them, "Do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews?" Confident that that's exactly what they would want. Now, you remember that one of the principal charges that the chief priests had brought against the Lord was that He claimed to be a king, that He was a traitor to Rome, that He was a rival of Caesar. And yet, Pilate says, "He is a king." Pilate wasn't fooled by their accusation. He didn't take it seriously. He knew the real motivation of the Jewish leaders, knew that they had no loyalty to Rome. As Mark states in verse 10, he knew that they had delivered up the Lord because of envy. Pilate knew that they were simply using him to remove a man who was a threat and a challenge to them. He must've known of the Lord's immense popularity. He's the governor of that region. He would've had his spies among the people. They would've told him of what was going on. After all, the Lord had been ministering for some three years, and he must've been aware of some of what was happening. You would certainly think he was aware of the great excitement with which our Lord had been received on that previous Sunday, Palm Sunday, when He was ushered into the city among all of the exclamations of the people, the Hosannas, recognizing Him as king.

And so, playing upon that popularity, and using this custom of amnesty, he tried to reverse the Sanhedrin's plot by offering the Jews their king. As use of the title "king" may have been done with some contempt; as stated, Pilate was anti-Semitic. So, he was probably saying it in at least in part to taunt the leaders whom he had recognizable disdain for. But, at the same time in saying that, he may have been playing upon the nationalistic pride of the people and telling them, in effect, who they should choose. Choose your king. That's what he was hoping they'd do. And he was

certain that they'd do that. Certain, I think, even that the Jewish leaders would choose Christ.

After all, how could they do otherwise? Christ was clearly innocent, and to choose Barabbas would mean asking for the release of a man who was a notorious criminal, a man already convicted of insurrection, the very charge that they had brought against the Lord. How could they, with any consistency, ask for the release of a man who was a notorious insurrectionist, a murderer, a robber, a man who truly was a threat to the peace, the very piece they were trying to maintain?

So, it was a simple choice, as Pilate saw it, between guilt and innocence. But Pilate, for all of his intelligence, for all of his cleverness, he had underestimated the priests' hatred for the Lord, underestimated their shrewdness as well. They had condemned him in their secret council. They had worked hard. They had plotted long and carefully for this moment, and they were not going to let Pilate frustrate them with this custom of releasing a prisoner.

It was at this time, while Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, that Matthew records Pilate receiving a message from his wife. A very interesting event that takes place. We don't have time to develop it this morning, but it's during the night, she had a dream about the Lord, and it was a dream that troubled her a great deal. She says she's suffered greatly because of it, and so she urged Pilate to have nothing to do with this righteous man, which is another declaration that He is innocent, a declaration from the Gentiles. Something they recognized that, in a sense, was a condemnation of the Jews. Because here are the pagans recognizing that the Lord is innocent, while the Jewish people are seeking to condemn Him.

Well, meanwhile, while this is going on, while Pilate is getting this message, the priests took advantage of this interruption to influence the crowd. They stirred up the multitude, Mark says, to ask for the release of Barabbas. When that happened, Pilate was completely surprised by their answer, by their request. And he asked, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" And they shouted back, "Crucify Him!" They not only chose a murderer over their Messiah, but they wanted their Messiah put to death as well.

It must've astonished Pilate, and even set him back a moment. But he didn't give up. He was convinced of the Lord's innocence and presses them on that point. He asks, "Why, what evil has He done?"

Now, in seeing in light of the other gospel accounts, this is the fourth time that Pilate declares the Lord innocent, because that's the point of his question. What evil has He done? I can find no evil in this man, which not only underscores the innocence of our Lord, but it underscores the guilt of these men, the guilt of Israel, the guilt of Pilate as well. He never should've raised those questions. They're valid questions, I suppose, but Pilate was the judge. It was his responsibility to render the verdict. Why is he appealing to the crowd. He's appealing to the crowd because he wants to avoid his responsibility when what he should've done was simply declare Him innocent and release Him. That was his responsibility. He had the truth on his side, but he didn't have the courage to act upon it. So, he put the Lord's verdict, and in a sense, put His fate in the hands of the mob. And they cried out, "Crucify Him!"

Now, that raises a puzzling question. How is it that the crowd could cheer Jesus on Sunday, hail Him as their king, and then five days later, cry out for His crucifixion? Well, the answer may be that it was a different crowd. The enthusiastic crowd of Palm Sunday was composed mainly of pilgrims from galilee where the Lord had His main base of support, while this crowd at the praetorium on Good Friday was made up principally of people from Judea. Many of these people, as we've noted, were probably supporters of Barabbas, who had come to seek his release. And so, it was very natural for them to choose him. The priests also had their people in that crowd who were speaking as they do. And so, that would account, at least to some degree, for this different attitude in the crowd.

And yet, maybe not completely account for it. The Lord did have supporters in Judea. You see that on Palm Sunday. People from Jerusalem poured out to greet Him. There's no evidence that Galileans weren't present; after all, the priests had to stir up the people. They had to convince them to choose Barabbas.

So, how is it that those who had been enthusiastic followers could have such a change of attitude? William Hendriksen explains it as the fickleness or instability of the human heart and mind apart from regenerating grace. I think he's probably correct in that. The heart of the natural man, the heart that has not been changed by the grace of God is untrustworthy. It is unreliable. It does change. And the priests were able to capitalize on that, perhaps by circulating stories that the Lord had committed blasphemy, perhaps by threatening the people. They were not averse to doing that. We have examples in the gospels of them threatening the people.

Further, the people weren't prepared for what occurred. They were looking for a messiah of a different kind. And when He turned out not to be the conquering king that they thought He was going to be, then they turned away from Him. And so, fundamentally, this change goes back to an ignorance of Scripture and a lack of faith. There was no reason to doubt that Jesus was the Messiah. His teaching, His miracles, His character all proved Him to be the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament, proved Him to be the redeemer that had been promised to have fallen in a sinful and a condemned world. Everything in His life, and the events that were unfolding before them demonstrated that He is the promised Messiah. He is the Christ. But when the Scriptures are neglected, tragic decisions are made.

Pilate wasn't ready for the decision which he suddenly faced, and the people weren't either. There's a warning in that for all of us, because we too will face decisions, unexpected challenges in life. And the only way to prepare for them is to be alert daily, by not neglecting the prayerful study of Scripture, by taking to heart the truths of the Bible by being students of the Word of God. We face all kinds of challenges in our lives. And often times, the challenges that we face are like those that Pilate faced: the challenge to defend Christ, to stand with Him. Basically, that's what Pilate was challenged to do.

And, as I think about that, I must confess that there have been times, and I , to be completely honest, many times when I have responded to that challenge in much the same way that Pilate did. The fear of men has kept me silent about our Lord. Have you ever experienced that? Sure you have. We all have. And we will continue to face that same challenge all through our life. That's why we need to be constantly in the Word of God, and we need to be constantly in study, in prayer, so that our faith will be strengthened. Because so much of the Christian life is a struggle between faith and fear.

Proverbs 29:25 speaks to the point. It speaks to Pilate, it speaks to us. The proverb reads: "The fear of men brings a snare. But he who trusts in the Lord will be exalted." Pilate was a man who feared men, feared that he wouldn't be exalted, feared that he would be brought down from his position and not advance in the government. He feared. And yet, he is the one ultimately that's brought down, as are the Jewish leaders and the whole Jewish nation. It is the Lord who is the one who trusts. He is the one who trusts in his Father. And though He goes to the cross, He is exalted in the

resurrection, exalted in the ascension, exalted to the right hand of the Father. We can learn a lesson from that. As we trust in Him, we will be exalted. The nation wasn't trusting in the Lord, and it had no firm basis in the Word of God. Pilate had none at all. And so, when faced with this crisis, they were all swept away.

But the principal point here is not the sin of the nation and the guilt of Pilate, not the failure of men and of human justice. That's all there, I think, but that's not the principal point. The main point is the innocence of Christ. Throughout the trial of our Lord, as He stood before the Sanhedrin and stood before Pilate, He clearly stood innocent, sinless, guiltless. Pilate recognized it, but he was too weak to resist the people. To challenge them, he felt, would have been too dangerous for him politically. He had too many strikes against him already. An official complaint to Rome by the Jewish leaders might result in his recall. And so, to protect himself, we read in verse 15, "Wishing to satisfy the multitude, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified."

Flogging, or scourging, did not necessarily precede crucifixion. It often did, but not necessarily. We know from John's account that Pilate had the Lord scourged as a last attempt to satisfy the mob's demand for blood. And in so doing, he hoped to prevent a crucifixion. It was a brutal form of punishment. It was carried out with a whip that was made of strips of leather with pieces of bone and lead embedded in the ends. The whip was brought down on the victim's shoulders, back, and legs with full force until the flesh hung in bleeding shreds.

In fact, Josephus speaks of this and says that sometimes the bone and the entrails of a person could be visible. It wasn't infrequent for people to die under this form of punishment. It's amazing that the Lord could stand after this, and even carry his cross for a while. John tells us that Pilate then brought Him out before the people and again said, "I find no guilt in Him." But it failed to satisfy the crowd, and again they cried out, "Crucify, crucify."

And so, in an attempt to uphold justice, Pilate violated justice by scourging an innocent man. And then, out of weakness and fear, he gave the Lord over to be crucified. It was history's greatest miscarriage of justice. An innocent man, the perfect man, sentenced to death in the place of a convicted criminal and brutally scourged, even though He was sinless. And yet, in it all, we recognize the hand of God. We see prophecies being fulfilled, the outworking of God's plan of salvation.

All of the details that we see before us. He came to suffer in our place. God sent His Son for that very purpose, to be a substitute for sinners.

And Isaiah wrote of this very thing. In Isaiah 53:5, where he writes, "He was crushed for our iniquities. The chastening of our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging, we are healed." Substitution and punishment is the point of that verse. That's what it underscores. And the exchange of our Lord for Barabbas is a picture of that, a clear illustration of what the Lord did when He changed places with the sinner on the cross in what Martin Luther called the "sweet exchange."

Barabbas was a robber, a murderer whose guilt is not in question. He stood convicted and awaiting execution, awaiting the full penalty of the law. And that picture is a picture of our condition before our deliverance. What Paul tells the Ephesians in Ephesians 2 verses 1 through 3 is true of all of us. "You were dead in your trespasses and sins. The sons of disobedience, by nature children of wrath, that is deserving of wrath because of your disobedience." Or as John writes in John 3:18, "Judge already all unbelievers. Stand already condemned, already judged." They are simply waiting for the execution.

Paul also tells the Ephesians that they were formally without hope. And don't you know that on that morning of the crucifixion, Barabbas awoke with a profound sense of hopelessness. His cross had already been made. He was simply awaiting the execution when the prison door flew open and a Roman guard told him, "You're free. Another man is dying in your place." Christ's life, in exchange for Barabbas'. Barabbas' cross was taken up by Christ, and Barabbas was released from the penalty of the law.

What Barabbas experienced in the physical, the believer experiences in the spiritual. And it is an infinitely greater deliverance that we experience in Christ, and enables us to sing, "He breaks the power of cancelled sin. He sets the prisoner free."

What Barabbas' response was to that sweet exchange is unknown to us. You can't help but wonder what it might've been if perhaps out of curiosity, he followed the Lord to Calvary and he watched in amazement as He underwent the crucifixion, and he listened intently as He heard the Lord's words uttered from the cross. And then, you wonder if maybe out of thankfulness for what he had escaped at Christ's expense, he worshiped Him? He took up His cross and began to follow Christ? You wonder if that might've been the case, or if perhaps he simply responded with

indifference and rejoiced over his good luck, and then went back and again took up the sword.

We don't know. He disappears from the record of Scripture as quickly as he appeared. We only know what his response should've been, which is the response that should be ours as well: a response of gratitude. Because He died in our place, we enjoy the free, unmerited gift of eternal life. We, who formally were condemned, were without hope, were delivered from eternal punishment and given eternal life, that the cross, our sins, were imputed to Christ so that through faith, His righteousness would be imputed to us. He was clothed in our sin, that we might be clothed in His righteousness. And as a result, all who trust in Him and who have experienced what Luther described as the sweet exchange, can also pray the prayer that Luther prayed when he prayed, "Thou, Lord Jesus, art my righteousness, and I am thy sin. Thou hast taken on thyself what thou wast not and hast given to me what I am not."

That is true of all who have believed in Christ. Have you done that? Do you know the forgiveness of sin and the freedom from the punishment of sin? Or are you still a prisoner, condemned and awaiting execution? At the beginning of our study, I stated that historically, the trial of our Lord was one in which Christ stood before Pilate. But in reality, spiritually, it is Pilate who stood before Christ. Pilate who, in the end, was judged by our Lord. That may be true of some of you this morning. You are standing before our Lord. You have faced Him in the text of Scripture, and your response to Him is a judgment you render on yourself. He is the innocent son of God who died in the place of sinners. To reject Him is to convict yourself of guilt. Don't do that. Don't play the part of Pilate; play the part of Barabbas. Receive the Lord as your substitute, believe in Christ as the sinless Savior, the spotless Lamb of God who suffered in the place of sinners so that all who believe in Him might go free, might have everlasting life. We enter into that through faith and faith alone. If you've never believed in Christ, I urge you: believe in Him and receive the forgiveness of sins. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Our gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for the sweet exchange that occurred on the cross when Your Son, the spotless Lamb of God, the innocent one, the only perfect, guiltless man who's ever lived, went to die in our place. Lord, we can never, never express the gratitude that we should express. We

will have all eternity to do that, and never, never be able to do it. But, we do thank You for the exchange that You made for us in Your Son, and for the life that we have in Him. May we live lives that are pleasing to You, bring glory to His name. We pray in His name. Amen.