

Matthew 23-03-05b

We resume our study now in Matthew chapter 27, and we are looking at the perspective here. There are so many different ways you can take the gemstone of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and turn it in the light and see eternal truths, see facets, appreciate the Lord Jesus, appreciate the plan and the purpose of God the Father and his love for us. The death of the cross that Jesus endured knowing ahead of time what he was getting into, it wasn't a surprise, it didn't come as a shock.

He knowingly and willingly entered into this darkest of all days for us. The ultimate expression of that truth that the Jewish virtual library article pointed out, they acknowledged that Jesus acknowledged the two great features of Torah of the law are to love the Lord your God and to love your neighbor as yourself. The ultimate expression of that, the ultimate fulfillment of that is right here.

Jesus is undergoing this heinous injustice, this egregious wrong at the hands of evil self-interested believers and unbelievers, the Jews and the Romans equally complicit, equally involved, equally responsible so that the world stands condemned before God. All have sinned. There is none that doeth righteousness, no, not one.

All the world stands guilty before God and it is brought together in this conspiracy of envy, cowardice, fear, sham, hypocritical behavior to maintain a status quo, self-interested wealth, power, status, all of it in this most unholy of all mixes is found in this passage. I would like to pick up reading a little bit more of this article. Again, this is in the jewishvirtuallibrary.org. It is entitled Christian Jewish Relations, colon, Jesus, Crucifixion, Pontius Pilate and the New Testament.

It's a long title. You can get there by simply searching on Jesus, Pilate and Crucifixion and watch for the Jewish Virtual Library. I read you the first several paragraphs of this where the sentence says, "Indeed, it was precisely because of the military association with the word Messiah that the occupying Roman authorities must have seen Jesus as dangerous and decided to crucify him." That is not at all true.

There is no evidence to support it. One of the constant cries against the truth and authority of the New Testament scriptures is that where are the Roman records? If Jesus was such a big noise, why doesn't he show up in Roman history? You don't find him until Tacitus much later. And how come there are no contemporaneous Roman records about Jesus and his followers and the necessity to crucify him and so on? Because to the Romans, it was barely a blip contra what the Jews are trying to argue here.

It didn't make Roman history because it was insignificant. He was in no way, say, of the stature of Martin Luther King to the American government in the 1960s. Jesus didn't pose that kind of threat.

Pilate didn't say, "'I'm so glad the Jews brought me this man who is threatening instability and is raising troops and is about to overthrow our garrisons and our Roman centurions and their legions and so on.'" Pilate says, "'I'm gonna let this guy go. He hasn't done anything wrong. He's no threat.

Even my wife is convinced he is no threat. So this is completely irresponsible. But what does it tell us?' You can say, "'Well, those Jews, they're just... I would rather look at the three fingers pointing back at me.

How capable am I of finding a way to shift blame for what is rightfully my fault, rightfully a result of my envy or my fear or my self-interest, where I am shifting the blame to other people, to other circumstances, to other causes. I will vindicate myself by shifting responsibility someplace else. We're all made out of the same mud.

If you see somebody in a fault, failing, the first instinct is, you know, there but for the grace of God go I. And if I do not actively seize and lay hold of the grace of God, I will go that way. It is only grace that stops us from doing this very thing. And that is grace that is available, but it is not automatic.

Just because you're a believer, these religious leaders, every single one of them believes God. They believe that the Old Testament scriptures are inspired by God. They believe Moses was a prophet of God.

They believe in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They believe. They believe in the God of Israel with their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

They've memorized vast portions of his scripture. The chief priests, the elders, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, these are all believers and look at what they're doing. We are all believers.

Look at the scriptures and see what we are capable of blindly, unwittingly. The magnetic needle in our moral compass shows us true north. We think we're doing fine.

We justify ourselves. We comfort ourselves. We can talk to other people around us who think, feel, and act the same way and see, I'm okay.

You're okay. I actually bought a copy of that book one time in an antique store because it's a signal moment in the 1960s. I'm okay.

You're okay. It is part of the launch of the sexual revolution of moral freedom, of dismantling Christianity in our culture. I'm okay.

You're okay. We can do this. If you don't remember another thing from our study in the word of God this morning, you think about this moment where Gentiles and Jews have collected together to perpetrate the greatest crime in human history and they all think

they're fine.

Pilate recognizes the wrongness of it, the bad motivation of it, and he is able to literally wash his hands of it. I thought about going and looking at all of the cases of washing hands. Washing hands was not a Roman custom.

It's a Jewish custom. And when Pilate does this in front of the Jews, he is sending the Jews a message. This is not a message for him.

He doesn't feel any better before or after by washing his own hands. He is, does it publicly, has a basin of water brought out, and he gets water, he raises his hands so the whole crowd can see him washing his hands because this is a Jewish ritual of cleansing. Wash your hands, you sinners, right? It's a message from him to them.

This is not my fault. He's going to give the order and yet he is going to vindicate himself. His judgment on Jesus is going to be false and his judgment on himself is going to be false.

The only real verdict he's going to render here is the one on himself. And he's going to say, I am innocent. He says, I think this man has done no wrong, but he doesn't encode that into a legal decision.

His legal decision is death penalty. So his decision on Jesus is wrong, and he knows it's wrong. His decision about himself, he thinks is right as he washes his hands and says, I am innocent.

Look at the declaration. Since when does the judge in a trial listen to the verdict, give sentence, and say, I myself am innocent. A judge is not qualified to judge himself.

They don't bring a judge up on bribery and corruption charges and say, well, judge, what do you think about these charges? Well, I'm innocent. So, okay, let's let him go. The travesty of the judge in a sham trial, giving a bad verdict that he knows is wrong, declaring himself innocent on the very same occasion is beyond the pale, and it's supposed to be.

It is depicted here to talk to me and to talk to you, to convict us in the hands of the Holy Spirit. We do this. We do this same thing.

We declare ourself innocent. We're not even the judge, and we declare ourselves innocent. It's that over there.

It's him, it's her, it's that, it's them, it's circumstances. I can't be held responsible. I am innocent.

No, we're not. We are guilty. The whole world stands guilty before God.

And the first step in recovery is to confess our sins. When's the last time we gave deep, serious thought to 1 John 1, 9? If we confess our sins. We don't confess the sins of others.

We don't confess the crimes of humanity and the fault of the world. People will go to the prayer of Daniel. They'll go to the prayer of Nehemiah and say, look how they're confessing corporate sin.

Watch carefully. That is a different thing, because that is confession of the sins of a nation that is in covenant relationship to God. Our nation is not in covenant relationship to God.

Our church is not corporately in covenant relationship with God. In this age, we are individually, individually in covenant relationship with God. And it is in the context of that relationship that we identify and confess sin.

If we confess our sins, I don't need to go back in history and confess the sins of my fathers and the rest of it. The reason you see that in the Old Testament is because as goes the nation in the Old Testament, so goes the individual believer in the new. But that's been misconstrued.

I could ramble on at length about the tragedy of misapprehending dispensations. People are throwing, dispensationalism has become highly unpopular because the truth that it reveals is uncomfortable and harsh. People don't like it.

They don't want it. So dispensations are out. We don't want to understand that there's a difference between Israel and the church.

We don't want to understand the difference between what every Bible states in black and white ink, Old Testament, New Testament. Old people of God, new people of God, look at your Bible. But they don't.

But this blindness, I'm not worried about Pilate. I'm not worried about these Jews in the first century. I'm not worried about the Jews of the modern day.

I'm not worried about Christianity at large. I am worried first and foremost about me because these things are written for our instruction. And this kind of blindness, this kind of self-satisfied assurance that I am right, and I look around and people on every side think and believe the same.

So we must be right. Look at how many of us there are. Is scary.

It ought to sober us. It ought to drive us to the throne of grace, to the foot of the cross, in abject recognition of our corruption, our fallenness, our tendency to blindly sin. I have mentioned it every week and I will continue to mention it.

Psalms 51. Search me, oh God, and know my heart. Try me and see if there be any wicked way in me.

Show me my hidden faults. We're never going to find it on our own. We're too subjective.

We're trapped within our own head. It takes the objective truth. It takes the ministry and presence and witness and power of God's Holy Spirit to get these scales to fall from our eyes and help us to see clearly.

There is no other way. We will always vindicate ourselves. We will be pilot.

We will wash our hands and say, yeah, you people, you brought him to me. You want him dead. You go take care of it.

Although I'm going to give the official decision and provide the troops that will in fact enact the decision. But it's not me. My hands are clean.

Look, I'm sending you a message. It's not my fault. I judge myself innocent.

And he's not. Without Pilate's cooperation, the crucifixion could not have happened. At best, what would have happened? If Pilate had said, no way, I'm releasing Barabbas.

Jesus, you're free to go. And what would the Sanhedrin led mob have had to do at that point? Stone him, stone him. Everybody grab rocks.

And they would have done what's going to happen later on in Acts chapter seven to Stephen. More about that here shortly. But that would have been significant in the sense that the Gentiles refused to convict an innocent man.

And the Jews, the people of God, the covenant related to them belong, the law, the prophets, the writings, the covenants, the testimonies. They would have done it with their own hands, which was God's intention from the beginning that a death penalty offense in Israel be conducted by stoning with all the people taking a part. If they want his blood to be on them and their children, then you pick up rocks and you do it yourself.

But Pilate is complicit and significantly so. And by extension, we are all in need of recognition of our involvement in sin and evil. And we cannot make any progress.

We are never going to recover from blindness. Because you say you have no sin, because you say we see, your sin remains. I see, I know what's right and what's wrong.

I know where I'm guilty. I know whose fault this really is. Because you say we see, Jesus told these same leaders, your sin remains.

Can't recover from sin and can't recover from its blindness without a heartfelt search and appeal to the Holy Spirit. First John 1.9 is not a little quick trick to get on with life. It

is a necessary, rigorous, intensive analysis of who we are, why we're here, where we have fallen short and where we need God's grace to heal us, to cleanse us, to enable us, to empower us.

David understood this, wash me and I shall be clean. Purge me with hyssop, I will be clean. Wash me, I will be whiter than snow.

Such an interesting and seemingly illogical notion that you can wash white robes in blood and have them be whiter than snow. That hyssop dipped in sacrificial blood makes you clean. When blood and other bodily fluids supposedly rendered someone unclean.

Remember in the law, woman with an issue of blood, unclean, unclean, leaking any kind of bodily fluids, unclean. Touching blood, unclean. And yet it is the blood of Jesus Christ that so illogically cleanses us.

What does contact with Jesus' blood do? Here, it is condemnation and curse on this generation of Jews and their children, willingly so. His blood be on us. We can pray, let the blood of Jesus Christ be on us.

May we be cleansed. May we be sanctified. May we be renewed in our minds and purged of all unrighteousness in our hearts so that we can serve, so that we are clean, so that we can approach the very throne of God in heaven by the blood of Christ.

The study of the theme of the blood of Christ is enormous. I could do six months just on the blood of Christ foreshadowed in the Old Testament. Every passage that talks about it in the New, it's from Matthew to the end of Revelation, the blood of Jesus Christ, how important is it? But so significant here that Pilate talks about the relationship of the blood of Jesus Christ and himself.

The people of Israel talk about the relationship between themselves and the blood of Jesus Christ here. The blood of Jesus Christ was spoken of the previous evening in the upper room. This is the new covenant in my blood.

And what is the effect? It's similar to what Jesus said that he is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, but he is also the rock on which a permanent foundation and a lasting structure can be built. You build your house on the rock. Are you crushed by the rock or do you fall on the rock? It's the same rock, but on some, it is a rock of salvation.

On others, it is a rock of judgment. The stone that was seen in the vision in the book of Daniel that smashes the image with the head of gold as the establishment of an unending kingdom represents the Lord Jesus Christ. What kind of rock is he? Is he the rock that is stricken and water of life flows out or is he a rock of judgment? Same rock, it's up to us.

The blood of Jesus Christ, is it going to be on us by way of responsibility for injustice, for

self-justification, self-righteousness, hypocrisy, blaming anybody but me? The blood of Jesus Christ brings that conviction. It's on us for judgment or is it on us for cleansing? We decide, we choose. And if we stand like Pilate and try to tell the world, it wasn't me, it's not me, not my fault.

Look, I'm not just saying that in my heart of hearts, I'm telling you, wasn't me, I am innocent. I judge myself innocent. You're not the judge that counts, Governor Pilate.

There is a judge and his judgment is eternal. I wanna read a little bit more of this article. Precisely because of the military association with the word Messiah, this is probably why the Roman authorities saw Jesus as dangerous, decided to crucify him.

That the Romans hung over Jesus' body, a sign proclaiming his crime, King of the Jews, again underscores the apparently militant and political direction of his activities. Militant and political. People try to make Jesus militant and political today, by the way, that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was a call to social justice.

Blessed are those who, they re-translate to kaiousune, blessed are those who hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall be filled. Talked about that last week. So to, you make the same mistake as the Jews, if you believe that Jesus was militant and political for social justice, for Roman overthrow.

It's abundantly clear both by what is said in the gospels and what is not said. We've talked about that on other occasions. Let me continue with the article.

So Jesus' nationalism, which occasionally spilled over into an unpleasant chauvinism, is illustrated by a story in Matthew. A story which we have seen back in chapter 15. Let me just read that again.

And I'm not just picking on the Jews in general, this author in particular, or I am more concerned with the fact that this viewpoint is being adopted by our fellow believers. Allegedly Bible informed, allegedly loving the Lord Jesus and loving their neighbor, allegedly trying to follow God by casting off unhappy traditions and being kind and golden rule, et cetera. With that banner flying over their heads, there are thousands, tens of thousands, millions of believers buying books, posting online with this same attitude.

Let me read it. Jesus' nationalism, which occasionally spilled over into an unpleasant chauvinism, is illustrated by a story in Matthew. Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

Out came a Canaanite woman from the district, started shouting, Sir, son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil. But he answered her not a word.

His disciples went and pleaded with him, give her what she wants, they said, because

she is shouting after us. He said in reply, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But the woman had come up and was kneeling at his feet.

Lord, she said, help me. He replied, it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house dogs. She retorted, ah, yes, sir.

But even house dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered her, woman, you have great faith. Let your wish be granted.

Matthew 15, 21 through 28. So this is given as evidence that Jesus was nationalistic because he said I am sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And he's chauvinistic because he initially does not want to grant this woman's request.

I, let me be very clear. I am giving this as an example of how my mind can work. This is what my mind can do with evidence, with facts, with circumstance.

I can misconstrue this and so can you. And I can't always realize that that's what I'm doing. It seems right to me and it's comfortable for me.

I like the conclusion. I like how it feels. I like the fact that it's somebody else's fault.

Somebody else is involved. Well, that's part of that pattern there. They're part of that.

Even as I talk about progressive Christianity and those who are abusing scripture and only paying attention to certain parts of the red ink, I constantly, constantly watch myself. I can't fix them. I can observe them.

But the point of the observation is to turn my laser gaze on myself and say, I see this happening with other people. This tells me that people are capable of this, people who read their Bibles, people who love God, people who want to be pleasing in God's sight in some form or fashion. And yet I perceive this as a problem, an error, and as unbiblical and as dangerous.

But the point of me having that observation isn't to go fix those people. It is to not step into that trap myself. The only benefit is gonna come by me being warned.

Jesus warned Judas. Jesus warned the religious leadership of his day. Jesus warned the people.

Jesus warned his disciples. What did they do with the Lord? Jesus warned Peter. We just saw that a couple of weeks back.

Remember all the warnings Jesus gave Peter? You're going to deny me. No, Lord, I won't. Fatal, fatal mistake to not heed the warning, to not take it to heart and say, I have got to get the power of God inside me so this doesn't happen.

It's the only reason. This is a bad feature of political discords in our country right now is everybody's on a witch hunt to try to find something wrong with the other side instead of being on a witch hunt to find out what's wrong on our side. How can we be better? How can we observe what we perceive to be wrong and not perpetrate a like manifestation ourselves? You can't fix those guys over there.

We can only, by God's grace, get fixed. What is the blood of Christ going to do in its contact with us? Condemn us or cleanse us? Curse us or heal us? Expose our sin and our evil or wash us and make us clean? That's the question. Me, myself, my relationship with God, my understanding of truth.

I don't need to be thinking, boy, I wish old so-and-so over there could hear this lesson. It's dangerous. As soon as you hear yourself even starting down that road, just say, oh, maybe I ought to go back and listen to this whole thing again myself.

The reason I think it's good is because it has struck something in me. Maybe I need to start letting the word of God be like a fire and a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. Let me just let that hammer pulverize this rock in my soul.

So now, back to the article. Concerning Jesus' executioner Pontius Pilate, we have a considerable body of data. Listen closely now.

You may have heard this before. We have a considerable body of data that contradicts the largely sympathetic portrayal of him in the New Testament. Even among the long line of cruel procurators who ruled Judea, Pilate stood out as a notorious, vicious man.

He eventually was replaced after he murdered a group of Samaritans. The Romans realized that keeping him in power would only provoke continual rebellions. The gentle, kind-hearted Pilate of the New Testament, who in his heart of hearts really did not want to harm Jesus, is fictional.

Like most fictions, the story was created with a purpose. When the New Testament was written, Christianity was banned by Roman law. The Romans, well aware that they had executed Christianity's founder, indeed, the reference to Jesus' crucifixion by the Roman historian Tacitus is among the earliest allusions to him outside the New Testament, but the Romans had no reason to rescind their anti-Christian legislation.

Christianity's only hope for gaining legitimacy was to, quote, prove to Rome that its crucifixion of Jesus had been a terrible error and had only come about because the Jews forced Pilate to do it. Thus, the New Testament depicts Pilate as wishing to spare Jesus from punishment, only to be stymied by a large Jewish mob yelling, crucify him. The account ignores one simple fact.

Pilate's power in Judea was absolute. Had he wanted to absolve Jesus, he would have done so. He certainly would not have allowed a mob of Jews, whom he detested, to force

him into killing someone whom he admired.

Now, I have heard and read this numerous places. There are historical accounts of Pilate, and he was cruel. He was obdurate.

He was wantonly murderous. So what about this? How much traction does this have? I'm inclined, as I know you are, to believe the New Testament over a 2,000 years later argument that absolves my Jewish forebears as this author of responsibility for the crucifixion and pushes it onto Pilate because he was known to be cruel. He murdered Samaritans, et cetera.

Here's something that is little known and little brought up, and it's two factors combined. First of all, when was Jesus born? You're gonna think, what? Just bear with me. When was Jesus born? In the vicinity of 6 BC.

Herod, who talked to the wise men and killed all the children two years old and under, died in 4 BC. Killing the children two years old and under means that Jesus was born before 4 BC, as early as 6 BC, certainly no later than 5 BC because Herod died in the year four, right? And remember, Mary and Joseph and the Christ child are down in Egypt until they hear that those who sought the child's life are dead. This speaks of a period of time, not a brief, three-day stay in their back heading for home.

They were down there for something measured in months, if not years. So a secure estimate with plus or minus a year is that Jesus was born in six. We also know that Jesus began his earthly ministry at around 30 years of age, which means you have to adjust the math because there is no year zero.

So in the year one, AD one, Jesus would have been five years old, right? So in the year 21, he's 25. So in the year 26, he's about 30. 25 to 26 to 27, just give a year's leeway, somewhere 25, 26, 27, Jesus is about 30 years of age.

He has a three-year ministry. We know this by counting Passovers and feasts in Jerusalem that which Jesus attends in the chronological order. And this seems to be the third and final Passover.

So let's just pick the year 25 and move forward to 26, 27, 28. So we're early in the year AD 28, right? Now, here's the thing. Pilate from known and well-established records was the procurator, the governor in this area from AD 26 to AD 37.

26 to 37. He was a troubled Roman nobleman and his benefactor who finally secured this post for him had to hunt and search to find a place where he could serve. And they thought, well, let's stick him down there with the Jews because that's a trouble spot anyway.

Historically and presently. So let's put him down there. And this is his first post.

This is his first assignment. He's wet behind the ears. He's green.

He's new to governing as a Roman nobleman. And he's got a real can of worms in Judea. How long has he been a governor when Jesus is brought before him by these manic, troublesome Jewish leaders? About a year.

About a year. If he was appointed late in 26, and this is early 28, it's maybe a year and a half at most. But he doesn't have the 11 years experience he will have by the time he has established his reputation after this event for hardness, for cruelty, for insensitivity to what people come up and try to tell him, because this is where he gets burned.

This is where everything goes sideways for him because of his inexperience. And it is fully possible that because he doesn't yet have the chops, he doesn't know how to govern and how to balance Roman responsibility with keeping the Jews satisfied. He is in the early months of trying to figure out how to do that.

And both things are true. He established a reputation for hardness, for cruelty, for wanton insensitivity. But in all likelihood, it is after, and perhaps as a result of this experience.

This is his first big test. He hasn't had any challenge until this Passover. And depending on that year's worth of variance, it could be that he had only been the procurator for a few months.

And this would explain why he's not real sure what to do. And so he sends Jesus to Herod. And Jesus answers, why would he send him to Herod? Well, he heard he was from Galilee.

This is a rookie mistake. If he wants to establish himself and he wants to show that he's dominant and in charge and in control and knows what he's doing, why would he defer and try to palm this off on Herod? I think it's because he's new. And he hasn't figured out what he is gonna quickly learn that he's got to be hard, he's got to be vicious, he's got to be cruel, he's got to be no-nonsense and show a solid wall front to these people.

Because when he tried cooperation, he tried involving Herod, he tried getting the people to release Jesus in favor of Barabbas, it all turned upside down on him. And he ended up having to kill an innocent man. And what do you think he heard from his wife when he got home on this day? What do you think she said? So I say that to say this, our lack of certainty when we are inexperienced, when we're in a new circumstance, we haven't been in this situation before, we haven't had this lack of resources, we haven't had this particular kind of challenge, haven't had to deal with this sort of people, haven't, it's new, we don't have experience.

It's not muscle memory, it's not instinctual, it's fresh. If you ever took driver's ed and you remember the first few times you got behind the wheel of a car, how uncertain you felt

and how paranoid and concentrating on every move and well, do I hit the turn signal? And am I gonna turn short? Am I gonna turn wide? Am I going fast enough? Am I going too slow? Oh, here comes another car. Are they, all of your uncertainty from the newness of it and the inexperience of it, now you can drive for miles, you can negotiate city streets and you kind of come to and you say, I don't even remember going through that town.

I don't remember making the turns. I don't remember the lane changes. I don't remember passing, I don't remember stopping.

I remember because it's all muscle memory. It's all done by our subconscious. What is the lesson in looking at Pilate's behavior here and what we know of him from the historical record as well as the scriptural record? When we are uncertain, we wanna find somebody else.

Let Herod make the decision. I'll let the people make the decision. I'm washing my hands of it.

I don't want to be accountable. I don't want to be responsible. I'm gonna push this onto someone else.

When it is his decision, it's his job and he's on the hook for the result. You can't wash your hands of something when you yourself are deciding it and yet he does. He's trying to fool himself.

He's trying to fool the people. It doesn't wash. Have you ever noticed sometime as your homework, read the Apostles' Creed? The Apostles' Creed, one of the earliest definitions of Christian faith.

Guess whose name is in it? It's not Caiaphas. It's not Annas. It's not Paul.

It's not Peter. You know whose name is in the Apostles' Creed? Pilate. Pilate is named in the Apostles' Creed.

That's something to chew on. I don't want Sam to be named in the Apostles' Creed for trying to absolve myself of what I should have confessed to have the blood of the Lord Jesus on me for conviction and for responsibility, me and my children, instead of for cleansing, for washing, for restoration. Which is it gonna be? It's our choice.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the details of this account that are so significant and so helpful to us in our quest to be more like the Lord Jesus in our dedication to fulfilling your plan and purpose in drinking whatever cup has been assigned to us, in bearing whatever cross we have been asked to carry. We pray that as we reflect on the example of the Lord Jesus and the example of those who brought him to this tragic point by their faults and their failures, their self-righteousness and their

hypocrisy, that we will be able to see, to confess, to be cleansed, to be enabled and empowered by your word and your spirit, to live a supernatural life, a life that transcends our flesh and our fallenness, the corruption of the world and the influence of Satan, to represent the Lord Jesus as his body on this earth and to be prepared for service and function in the kingdoms that are to come.

We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.