

The Twelve: The Triumph of Divine Justice, Part 2

Luke 6:16-19

Turn over to Matthew's Gospel, and we're going to start reading there in Matthew 27. The scene is set for us starting in Matthew 27:1-2. After the ad-hoc trial before the Sanhedrin, which took place in the early hours of the morning and we read this, "When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor."

The Sanhedrin, they having determined the verdict from the very beginning, and then just carrying out this trial to find some kind of a charge, proceed here with a process. Their process of putting someone to death in their land at this time required Roman involvement. They could not carry out the sentence of crucifixion or death on their own; they needed the Romans. In Roman occupied Jerusalem, the Jews did not have the power of capital punishment. They were required to submit all capital cases to the Romans for their review and approval. This

is a reminder from the Romans to the Jews that they're in charge, not the Jews. They held the power of life and death, not the Jews.

So the Sanhedrin proceeded according to what was really for them a distasteful plan, but they submitted to it and went forward. We find a very interesting account inserted between their delivering Jesus to Pilate and then the examination before Pilate. But notice in verse 3, "Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind. He brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.'" There you have it. The testimony of the consummate insider.

That's the testimony of the betrayer. The one with every interest imaginable to find a cause for handing Jesus over to the Jewish authorities after three years of intimate association with Jesus; he's eating meals with him, he's sleeping in the same room, he's around the same campfires. They're traveling everywhere together. They're inseparable, and after all that time, he can't find one condemning accusation to raise against Jesus. And it's important because if he had found one, he would've exposed Jesus as a fraud and then instead of becoming the pariah of human history, Judas would have been the hero of the Jewish nation. He

would have saved the whole nation from the wiles of yet another false Messiah.

So if he had been able to find one single reason for betraying Jesus, not only would it have cleared his name, cleared his conscience with any nagging guilt, but you know what, it would have literally saved his neck. Let's keep reading. It says in verse 4 there, it says, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood. And they said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.' Throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself."

We find out from Chapter 1 of Acts that not only did he hang himself, but either the rope that he was using broke, or the tree branch on which he hung himself broke, and he fell to quite a distance, and his body was broken and crushed on the rocks below him. Judas wanted to make sure he got it right. He did get it right. He did that well. He did everything well, really. But isn't it interesting how the Sanhedrin responded to him with such disdain, shabby, shabby treatment of their fellow collaborator. I mean, they owed him everything. Sinners, especially religious ones, hypocrites, they'll turn on their own in a heartbeat. Such cold hearts these chief priests and elders, as they shun Judas. Notice they don't care one bit for his

anxious soul, which again reveals their true nature. At this time in Israel, shepherds are not overseeing Israel; these men are ravenous wolves.

Since they rejected Judas' blood money, he threw it into the temple. Why the temple? Why would he do that? It's not the Greek word *heiros*, the large temple complex; it's the Greek word *naos*, the small inner sanctuary. Again, why would he do that, throw those coins, those thirty silver coins into the *naos*, the inner sanctuary, the Holy Place? Spite for spite. The *naos*, the Holy Place, that's a place only the priests could go. Not just any person from among Israel could walk in there; it had to be a priest.

So the priests, they had treated Judas spitefully. They refused to take that money from his hands because it was blood money, after all. But since this was the blood money, they had paid them, Judas returned spite for spite. He made those hypocritical priests go into the Holy Place, get down on their hands and knees, and gather up those thirty pieces of silver. And get this, they're gathering the blood money from the floor of the inner sanctuary, from the Holy Place, behind and before the veil that hid the Ark of the Covenant. They're basically bowing before God, picking up the blood money. Their supposedly pure

hands were just as dirty as his, and he wanted them to know it. So Judas forced the priests to acknowledge their complicity in killing the Christ, their guilt in the crime of betraying innocent blood. And in a revealing bit of irony, we find the religious leadership, they are on the same level as the most notorious traitor of all human history.

Look, that's why Judas' testimony is important. That's why God ordained that he would play that role in the redemptive story as a part of the apostolic band. The testimony of Judas, though he departed from the number of the twelve Apostles to go to his own place, his testimony is etched into the foundation of the church itself. Through the lips of his betrayal came the testimony of the innocence of Jesus Christ, spoken by a man who never loved Jesus, knew him to be an innocent, guiltless man, nevertheless.

Well, we've heard from the Jewish leadership, we've heard from the apostolic betrayer, the consummate insider. What about the Romans? What is the testimony of those enemies, these pagan Gentiles? You're already there in Matthew Chapter 27. Skip down to verse 11 and let's read Pilate's judgment of Jesus, along with Pilate's wife as well, as she speaks. What is their conclusion about him? It says there in Matthew 27:11, "Now Jesus stood

before the governor, and the governor asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus said, 'You have said so.' But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer." And "then Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?' But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so the governor was greatly amazed.

Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release to the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas," this insolent instigator of rebellion, "or Jesus who is called Christ," against whom you can find absolutely no charge. "For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, 'Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.'

"Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor again said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.' Pilate said to them, 'Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?' They all said, 'Let

him be crucified!’ And he said, ‘Why? What evil has he done?’ But they shouted all the more, ‘Let him be crucified!’ So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning,” and this is completely, if there’s one thing a Roman governor, in an occupied land cannot do, it’s allow a riot to erupt, “so he took water, he washed his hands before the crowd saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.’ And all the people answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!” Chilling words! “Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.”

Matthew condensed his account of the trials of Jesus before the pagan authorities. But Luke records something that Matthew skipped over. Pilate actually sent Jesus, during this time, to stand before Herod because he hoped that Herod would take over the case since Herod had jurisdiction over Galilean matters. But Herod examined Jesus as well; sent him back without any charges against him. So Pilate called the chief priests, the Jewish leadership, into his chambers and he told them privately, he said in Luke 23:14, “‘You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us.

Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish and release him.”

They protested so loudly, so violently Pilate feared a riot might ensue, so he delivered Jesus over to their will. Spineless reaction in this instance. As governor, Pilate should have used his authority to stand for justice. He should have delivered Jesus from the hands of wicked men, from this irrational mob, but he didn't do so. What was the testimony of the Gentiles portrayed here by Pilate and his wife? Righteous man, verse 19. Innocent of evil, verse 23. “Nothing deserving of death. They know it's only because of envy that the Jewish leaders want Jesus dead, and so complicit in handing Jesus over, complicit in the murder of Jesus, Pilate washed his hands in front of the people. He's symbolizing his innocence and guiltlessness in the matter. The Jewish nation shouts, “let him be crucified. His blood be on us and our children.”

Added to the voice of Pilate's protest, there was a veteran soldier in charge of the crucifixion detail. We heard from him earlier. He's a high-ranking centurion. He's a man familiar with death. He's in charge of the crucifixion detail, and if he had reported to the leadership, to Pilate and to others, that Jesus was dead when he truly wasn't dead, he would have forfeited his



own life. This man knows death. Not only did he affirm the death of Jesus Christ, but he also testified this, "Truly this was the Son of God." Take one of the thieves crucified next to Jesus. He rebuked the scornful thief next to him, and he added his own testimony to Jesus' innocence. "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong."

From top to bottom, from leadership to laity, from the criminal fringes of the nation to the very heart and soul, from the temple itself, the universal testimony is of the innocence of Jesus Christ. As Peter said, 1 Peter 1:19, he is "like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." He is the sinless One. And yet, "You leadership, you Jews, crucified and killed him by the hands of lawless men." Why did they do that? Setting aside for the moment the tainted motives of Judas Iscariot, setting aside the criminal who scorned him, setting aside the *hoi polloi*, the rabble who stirred up this fickle mob to cry out for Jesus' blood, how could a nation of supposedly God-fearing people be so confident, so self-assured that they're justified in crucifying Jesus the Christ? Why did they deliver him to death on the Cross? Listen, they thought God was on their side. They felt assured because they thought God was on their side.

That's the final testimony and this is the most important of all voices that we need to hear. It's the testimony of God. The testimony of God. The leadership of the Jews, as I said, they truly believed God was on their side. They saw Judas as an answer to their prayers. They interpreted the course of the last 24 hours as the perfect outworking of divine providence in their favor, affirming, confirming their cause. The very fact that Jesus hung on a cross seemed to indicate to them that they are the ones who are righteous.

They believed, because he's hanging on a cross, that God himself is against Jesus. They're simply the human instruments carrying out God's sentence of death, which is just, which is merited. After all, Galatians 3:13, it alludes to Deuteronomy 21:23. Galatians 3:13, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree." That's why when they walked by Jesus, as he hung there on the Cross, bleeding and dying, it says, we read it earlier verse 39, Matthew 27, "Those who passed by derided him and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! Since you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' So also the chief priests, with the scribes and the elders, mocked him saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts God; let God

deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, "I am the Son of God."'"

But God didn't come down from Heaven to deliver him from death, did he? God the Father let him die on that cross. So is that the final word? Did God the Father affirm and confirm the Jewish leaders who crucified and killed Jesus of Nazareth by the hands of lawless men? All we need to do is turn the page to Matthew 28:1 and following. "After the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. Behold, there was a great earthquake, an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance is like lightning, and his clothing white as snow."

Notice the Pharisees said as they walked by, "Let God come down from heaven and deliver him if he desires him," and here is God sending an angel from heaven to come down and deliver him because he desires him. "His appearance is like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has arisen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. And then go quickly and tell his

disciples that he has risen from the dead. Behold, he is going before you to Galilee and there you will see him. See, I have told you.' ”

Look, Jesus did appear, as we read at the beginning of the service from the Apostle Paul. He died for our sins, he, his body was buried, he was raised on the third day, all according to the Scriptures, prophecies in the Old Testament. Jesus appeared in his resurrected physical body, first to Cephas, then to the twelve. He appeared to more than 500 brothers, appeared to James and then to all the Apostles and then last of all, he appeared to Paul, that last Apostle, the Apostle Paul, one untimely born, he confirms for us the testimony of God the Father to the innocence and perfection of Christ because of the resurrection from the dead. If you can get there quickly, turn to Romans 1:1-4. Romans 1:1-4, “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an Apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,” Romans 1:3, “concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh,” and get this, “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Remember again those last words of scorn from the Jewish leadership. In their minds every word of Jesus Christ would be true if God himself would save him. "He trusts in God; let Him deliver him now if he desires him." So what is God's testimony? The most important testimony we can hear, Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." Listen, if God raised Jesus from the dead, God, whose testimony is the supreme, the absolute, the ultimate, the final authority, then we're assured of the perfection of Jesus Christ. And God did raise him, which means it's all true, folks, every last word of it.

All that Jesus said is true, all that Jesus' Apostles said is true, every word of the Gospel, every word of the Bible from Old Testament to New; it's all true. If you reject that Word, you'll join Judas. You'll join the unbelieving members of the Sanhedrin, the mocking crowds, Pilate, Herod, the brutally sadistic soldiers. You'll be numbered with that chorus of voices, who, though rejecting Jesus Christ because of hard-hearted unbelief, you'll at the same time affirm with them the innocence, the perfection of Jesus Christ as an undeniable fact. Talk about being on the wrong side of history.

But if you'll receive him, well, to you is the promise of God, "For to all who have received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Why didn't the Father come and take him off the cross because he was innocent? Because of the plan of redemption. He had to die for your sins and mine. 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of him."

Listen briefly to Isaiah 53, it explains this so well. "Jesus was despised, rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter; like a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

“By oppression in judgement he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? They made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

Look, according to that text, the only way Jesus could see his offspring, the only way that he shall prolong his days, the only way the will of the Lord is going to prosper in his hand, the only way that any of that is going to come true is if God raises him from the dead, which he did. And by the power of the resurrection, God causes all who believe in Christ to become the righteousness of God in him. God is pleased to allow the

resurrection of Jesus Christ and through his resurrection to divide a portion with the many, divide the spoil with the strong, and to grant them all eternal life. As Jesus said in John 5:21, “For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.” As Paul said, “If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit who dwells in you.”

Listen, folks, friends, all of you, it’s so important to repent of your sins. As we said from the very beginning, that same root of sins that put Jesus on the cross, sins of jealousy and greed, sins of envy and covetousness, sins of pride and self-centeredness, those sins, all of them, are in our hearts as well. If we’d been there at the moment, along with Pilate, along with the Jews, but for the grace of God, we would have been among that mocking, jeering crowd, letting him be crucified, his blood be on us and our children. Same sins. Same hearts. So, look, if you’ll repent of your sins, if you’ll embrace Jesus Christ by faith, if you’ll follow him from here on out as your only Savior, your one and only Lord, God will save you, too. “For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be



saved.” Look, that’s the message of the Gospel, which we know to be true because of the resurrection, because God raised him from the dead. Amen!

Father, thank you that we can take some time to reflect on the meaning of the crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection of Jesus Christ, his appearing to many and now, even, his ascension into heaven, bodily where he is with you at your right hand to intercede for us transgressors. We thank you that he is, he was numbered among the sinful, numbered among the sinners even though there was no sin in him. He knew no sin, and yet you numbered him among the transgressors that we might become the very righteousness of God in him.