

## The Guilty and the Guiltless One

Matt. 27:1-14

**Intro.** This AM I want to return to our study of Matthew's Gospel. Please find **Matt. 27**. This will be message #104 in our series and I'm feeling confident we can finish this series before Christmas. Maybe some will see that as my gift to you...I don't know.

Last week we were again reminded that this world is a dangerous place where evil and evil people abound. With the growing frequency of murderous attacks like the one in Las Vegas, it seems inconceivable that so many deny the reality of evil, but they do. I was pleased to hear our president and vice president denounce the crime as "pure evil." But evil doesn't fit in a worldview where morality is arbitrary and right and wrong are culturally defined. The existence of evil is out of sync with the notion that humanity is basically good and thanks to societal evolution, getting better. The secular view of evil is expressed this way...*"Evil, if any such thing exists, is not an inbuilt human flaw, but a product of defective social institutions, which can over time be permanently improved."* And I say, "good luck with that! 6,000 yrs. of recorded history doesn't support that theory. In fact, the passage of time has only produced crimes against humanity that are more sophisticated and effective." Today in 11 minutes, one man can kill 59 and injure 527 from a remote hotel window. But if you remember the Oklahoma bombing and 911, methods exist that can inflict far greater carnage than that. Yet despite the evil we see all around us, the concept of sin and evil isn't politically correct. They aren't tolerable to a world desperate to throw off divine authority and dismiss the God who alone determines what is good and what is evil. This denial of evil reminds me of a little poem that goes like this...*"There was a Faith Healer of deal, Who said, 'Although pain isn't real, If I sit on a pin, And it punctures my skin, I dislike what I fancy I feel."* Isn't it amazing how opinions can change when evil affects us directly?

But the reality and existence of evil is obvious and beyond question for those who believe God. In the Bible, the word evil appears 456x's in 437 verses! From the first mention of the word in **Gen. 2:9**, the phrase **good and evil** express the distinction. Because of **evil** the Lord sent the Flood in Noah's day. - **Gen. 6:5** And because of evil, a day is coming when God will again punish the world. **Isa. 13:11 - I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless.**

God's Word not only reveals the contrast between good and evil behavior, but the Bible clearly draws a line between good spirits and evil spirits as well as good men and evil men. And listen...God's view should settle the debate and be the one we listen to. Am I right about that? God says **evil** is an in-built human flaw and a violation of His holy standards. The world says it isn't. Who do you believe?

Yet no consideration of evil and the guilt it produces is more extreme than the evil perpetrated against Jesus Christ. And, no consideration of good is more emphatic than the righteous response of Jesus to the false accusations, barbaric cruelty and murderous designs of sinful men. That's what Matthew wants his readers to sense in the passage before us this AM. The Spirit of God guided him to set the horrible guilt of Judas and Israel's leaders in contrast with the innocent and guiltless demeanor of the Lord Jesus. His purpose here is to set good and evil side by side. His objective is to prove that Jesus is the Son of God and Israel's Messiah. Though He came as a man, Jesus proved He is unlike other men...He is holy, harmless and undefiled...even when unjustly treated with such brutality.

Prior to **chap. 27**, Jesus has celebrated Passover meal with His disciples in a borrowed upper room. Acting as Satan's pawn, Judas left the supper and went directly to the chief priests and elders to betray Jesus by leading them to Him. In the meantime, Jesus and His disciples left the upper room and crossed the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane on the western slope of the Mt. of Olives. While Jesus prayed and consented to His Father's will, He asked His disciples to watch and pray. As you know, they all fell asleep. In the darkness of the early morning hours Judas led a mob of Jewish leaders and Roman soldiers to that Gethsemane garden.

Because it was dark, the mob carried torches. They were armed with clubs and swords as though Jesus was a dangerous criminal. As they led Jesus away, His disciples fled for fear of their lives. Peter followed from a distance. From Gethsemane Jesus was taken first to the semi-retired priest Annas, and then to the acting High Priest, Caiaphas. By this time, many elders and teachers of the law had gathered at his palace. Their gathering created the appearance of legitimacy but this wasn't a typical trial nor was it legitimate. The proceedings were entirely illegal. A guilty judgment had already been determined and the punishment for Christ's alleged crimes had already been decided. **Chap. 26** closes with Peter's denials. Just as Jesus said he would, Peter denied Jesus 3x's before the rooster crowed. The chapter ends this way...**And he (Peter) went outside and wept bitterly.** First we see...

**1. The Corruption of Israel's leaders - vs. 1, 2 - Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.**

Following the informal and illegal nighttime sessions before Annas and Caiaphas, this phase of Christ's trials involved an official gathering of the Sanhedrin. Adam Clarke wrote, *"But as it was contrary to all forms of law to proceed against a person's life by night, they seem to have separated for a few hours, and then, at the break of day, came together again, pretending to conduct the business according to the forms of law."* To create the appearance of legitimacy, **Mk.15:1** says the whole Sanhedrin was present.

But once again...the verdict was in before trials ever began. For months the Jews had sought a reason and an opportunity to put Jesus to death. In the end, they accused him of blasphemy which according to Jewish law was punishable by death. Glance back at **Matt. 26:63-66**. It says, **But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered.** So Jesus was sentenced to death for telling the truth...for claiming to be who He really is. Despite the prophecies He fulfilled / the miracles He performed / and the unique authority of His teaching, John wrote, **He came to that which was his own...his own did not receive him.** Centuries earlier the prophet Isaiah said it would be this way when Israel's Messiah appeared. **Isa. 53:3 - He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.**

The point we need to grasp is that we are capable of the same evil that rejected and crucified Jesus. In our own ways, we too have denied His Lordship and held Him at arms length. If we had lived at that time, we might have been part of the crowd that shouted, *"Crucify Him, Crucify Him, we have no king but Caesar."* The secular world says evil is not an inbuilt human flaw. But the Bible says each of us was born with a bias against God and His righteousness. The sinful nature we all inherited from Adam is set against Christ and His rule over our lives.

Now Jesus is in custody and the Supreme Court of Israel has reached a verdict. But in order to put Him to death, the Jews had a second obstacle to overcome. Under Roman rule, they had lost many freedoms including the right to execute capital punishment. If Jesus was to be executed, they would have to appeal to Pontius Pilate the Roman governor of Judea. Pilate was a Gentile appointed by Caesar to govern Judea. His main duty was to keep peace among the Jews. Yet Pilate wasn't much of a peace-maker and turmoil had broken out under his rule. He was an unstable politician who made some unwise decisions. In Rome's view, he over-reacted when he mercilessly slaughtered some Jews. After Christ's death, he was banished to Gaul where he committed suicide.

This hearing before Pilate removed Jesus from the jurisdiction of Jewish Law. The whole matter was now under the Roman Code of Criminal Procedure. For a moment, turn to **Jn.18**. It was now 6:30 to 7:00 AM. **Jn. 18:28** says, **Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.** Here the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders is again exposed. They were conspiring to murder Jesus based on whatever charge they could find, but they refused to defile themselves by entering the palace of a Roman governor. They were eager to murder the Lamb of God while not wanting to be disqualified from celebrating the Passover that symbolized His sacrifice for them. They were criminal in attitude and intent, but spotlessly legal in their ceremonial regulations. Their hearts were corrupt, but they made sure their feet were clean. That's what legalism does. So these clerics waited outside until Pilate came out to them.

**Vs. 29, 30** say, **So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"** The Jews answered sarcastically, **"If he were not a criminal...we would not have handed him over to you."** Pilate said, **"Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."** **"But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected.** Pilate didn't realize they'd come because they wanted Jesus executed. The other gospels say they claimed Jesus was guilty of treason because He claimed to be King of the Jews. That alleged claim changed everything because it made Jesus a political threat. **v.33** says, **Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"** Jesus answered and said, **"Is that your own idea, or did others talk to you about Me?"** Then Pilate replied. **"Am I a Jew?...It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"** Pilate wanted to know if Jesus was leading a coup against the Roman government in Palestine. So Jesus answered, **"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."** Aside from Peter's sword that whacked off an ear, there was no evidence of rebellion or an organized coup against Rome.

Following accusation and interrogation, the third step in the Roman code was the defense. In the absence of legally required defense attorney, Pilate continued to question Jesus directly. **"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."** **"What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."**

The Jews wanted Jesus put to death but Pilate found no guilt...no treason...no legitimate reason to execute Jesus. He only heard some talk of a heavenly kingdom that was no threat to Rome. So **Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."** - **Lk. 23:4, 5** Yet Pilate's verdict was completely ignored by the leaders and the people of Israel who wanted Jesus crucified. In these verses we see how justice had become perverted in Israel. Apart from God, the nation had plummeted to that low state where the difference between good and evil was no longer recognized. Their handling of Jesus was evil but no one saw it that way. Isaiah saw this day coming and said, **"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter...who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent. - Isa. 5:20.** Let's return to **Matt. 27.**

## **2. The Self-Condemning Guilt of Judas - vs. 3-5**

As Judas watched the proceedings unfold and saw that Jesus was condemned, things became very real to him. He suddenly realized that he was guilty of what was to become the most despicable crime in all of history. Given so much exposure to the unique glory of the Lord Jesus, Judas turned Jesus over to His enemies. At least 7 points about sin and evil emerge from these verses.

- Sin never seems so evil until it unleashes the haunting power of an awakened conscience.*  
**v.3 - When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse...** Before and during sinful activity we're blinded and deceived. Sin doesn't appear as ugly and evil until after the fact. But like Adam and Eve, after the fact our vision improves and we see sin for what it is. In the days and weeks leading up to his betrayal Judas may have convinced himself that Jesus would somehow get out of this. I mean, up to this time, He seemed invincible. But **v.3** says, **When Judas...saw that Jesus was condemned...** his eyes were suddenly opened to see the horrible evil he committed.
- Sin exposes the true condition of a person's heart.* Jesus said in **Matt. 12:35 - The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.** Prior to the new birth, none of us have good stored up in our hearts. Sin is the outworking...the proof of the evil that resides within every one of us. As the prophet Jeremiah said, **The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. - Jer. 17:9** When someone is found guilty of evil we should never react in a judgmental, self-righteous way. Instead we should say in our hearts... "*there but for the grace of God go I.*" Every one of us is capable of unspeakable evil because evil is an in-built flaw in human nature.
- Remorse is not the same as repentance.* Judas was overwhelmed with sorrow when he realized what he had done. This is true of most people when they're caught. **II Cor. 7:10 - Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.** Judas could have turned to Jesus repented, but he didn't. He turned away from the One who could forgive him and confessed his sin to his guilty accomplices instead. Yet get this...Jesus died for the sin of the world and that includes the sin of Judas.
- Sin can't be undone and turning back the clock is never possible.* In **v.4** he said, "**I have sinned...for I have betrayed innocent blood.**" The verbs **have sinned** and **betrayed** are in the perfect tense which signifies completed action in past time. Nothing Judas could say or do could undo his crime. Like Judas, we all live with regret. Because Judas rejected Christ's salvation, his guilt and shame would accompany him to Hell and remain on him forever.
- Sin is always traced to some person who is responsible while accomplices run for cover.* When Judas confessed his sin to the priests, they responded, "**What is that to us?..." "That's your responsibility.**" They were right...but these religious leaders had no concern or compassion for Judas. They wanted nothing more to do with him. As Jesus said, they were *like their father, the devil.* Satan and these leaders used Judas to do this evil thing and then tossed him aside like trash. He had served their evil purpose and now he was a liability to them.
- Sin produces haunting symbols.* The 30 silver coins Judas coveted suddenly condemned him and he quickly got rid of them. **v.5** says, **So Judas threw the money into the temple and left.** He threw the coins on the Temple floor as though disposing of them could somehow absolve him of guilt. But it was too late. That's how it is with sin. Places, events, things and even people can become perpetual reminders of evil behavior. If Judas had survived, silver coins would haunt him and for the rest of his life, remind him of his crime.
- Sin inevitably leads to death.* **v.5** ends tragically...**Then he went away and hanged himself.** **Jas. 1:14, 15** tracks sin from its origin in the heart to its inevitable consequence. **...each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.** The Bible says death exists because of sin. **Rom. 6:23** says death is the wages sin earns. But did you know that twice as many people take their own lives than are killed by other people? That's shocking isn't it? The numbers are staggering.

People commit suicide for a variety of reasons and our hearts ache for those for whom depression and private suffering creates such desperation.

Judas seems to have been motivated by self-retribution. Overcome by a sense of guilt, he inflicted on himself the punishment he felt he deserved. Isn't it strange that guilt is real and experienced by so many, but evil isn't? But death couldn't relieve the guilt of Judas. Though his earthly life ended, Judas immediately entered a Christless eternity of torment where his guilt remains forever. You could live without this, but **Acts 1:18** adds some detail to his suicide. **With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out.**

So these are some lessons that emerge from the self-condemning guilt of Judas. Like the sin of Israel's leaders, he demonstrates the tragic reality of evil and evil men.

### **3. The Hypocritical Guilt of Israel's priests - vs. 6-10**

The hypocrisy of Israel's religious leaders shows up again in **v.6. The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money."** Forced to take back the bribe they paid to Judas, they devised a way to dispose of it. Make a note of this... they're OK with injustice and the despicable way they treated Jesus...they saw nothing wrong with that. But they felt they were breaking a rule if they returned the money to the temple treasury. As Jesus said of them earlier, **You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.** They were offended by any little ceremonial infraction, but they tolerated immorality that was huge and far more consequential.

In **v.4** Judas admitted that he had **sinned and betrayed innocent blood.** If Judas had been able to point to one sin...one flaw in Jesus...he might have soothed his conscience. But Jesus was entirely innocent and Judas knew it. And by calling these coins **blood money**, the priests condemned themselves. They admitted the bribe paid to Judas was too dirty to be put back into the treasury.

**v.7** says, **So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners.** The potter's field was probably a quarry where potters gathered clay. When the clay was depleted, the land was put up for sale at a cheap price. Colluding together, the priests hit on the idea that the field could be used to bury non-Jews who happened to die in Jewish territory. The idea was genius. By this Temple sponsored humanitarian gesture, they could soothe their conscience. Since dead bodies and burial places were considered defiled by Jewish law, they would use defiled money to purchase a defiled field. The idea was brilliant! Well, almost...

In Aramaic, the field became known as Akeldama, **the Field of Blood.** As **v.8** says, the field continued to be known by that name 30 years later when Matthew wrote this account. In fact, history says this field continued to be used as a burial place for non-Jews up to the first quarter of the 19th century! Instead of soothing their conscience and hiding their shame, the **Field of Blood** became a permanent memorial to their murderous conspiracy. And **vs.9, 10** say the purchase of this field actually fulfilled an ancient prophecy. **Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."** Imagine this...600 yrs. before Jesus came, God said Israel's leaders would do this. God knew His Son would be hated / rejected / betray-ed for 30 pieces of silver / and crucified. Matthew wants his readers to realize that every detail unfolded according to God's pre-determined plan to love us and to save us through His Son, Jesus Christ. God uses even the evil and wickedness of sinful men to move His plan forward. Yet even though evil is denied and punishment is often postponed, **Num. 14:18** declares, **'The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished...'**

Well, I've heard just about enough haven't you?...enough about sin, evil and guilt / enough about corruption and injustice / enough about bribery / hypocrisy / suicide / and blood money. So far the message sounds as disturbing as one night of evening News! But remember...through Matthew's pen, the Spirit of God has set up a contrast. He wants us to see the injustice and ugliness of evil in contrast with the holiness and perfect humanity of Jesus. He wants us to know who Jesus is and to believe that Jesus is the solution to the evil in the world.

**4. The Guiltless Silence of Jesus – vs. 11-14 - Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?" But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge--to the great amazement of the governor.**

I couldn't do what Jesus did and I suspect...neither could you. I couldn't be falsely arrested and roughly treated without resisting. I would defend myself. I couldn't remain silent when lies were told about me. The religious leaders, soldiers and Roman officials had seen many guilty men arrested and tried for their crimes. Yet none of them behaved the way Jesus did. None of them surrendered so peaceably. None of them accepted the verdict against them without creating a scene. But Jesus is not like other men and He knew something no one else knew. Though evil men seemed to be calling the shots, He knew His Father was in charge. Evil men could only do what His Father allowed them to. Despite the injustice of it all, He knew His Father's will was being carried out. In the Garden He had surrendered to the cup of suffering His Father had ordained for Him to drink.

By His extraordinary gentleness and submission, Jesus fulfilled an ancient prophecy about Him. About 600 yrs. before He came to earth, the prophet said, **He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open his mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.** - **Isa. 53:7** Pay attention Jewish reader. Your prophet said your Messiah would come in gentleness and meekness like a lamb.

It's significant to note that Jesus only responded with a "Yes" when the truth about Him was spoken. He made no reply when falsely accused...as **v.14** says, **not even to a single charge.** And notice... He conducted Himself this way **to the great amazement of the governor.** The famous British preacher Charles Spurgeon explained Pilate's amazement this way... *"Pilate had seen in captured Jews the fierce courage of fanaticism; but there was no fanaticism in Christ. He had also seen in many prisoners the meanness which will do or say anything to escape from death; but he saw nothing of that about our Lord. He saw in Him unusual gentleness and humility combined with majestic dignity. He beheld submission blended with innocence."*

Now remember, Peter witnessed the whole thing. He witnessed His arrest. He followed the mob to the courtyard of the High Priest where he made eye contact with Jesus. He may have mingled with the crowd outside the palace of Pilate. Sometime later this is what Peter wrote, **"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. – I Pet. 2:22-24**

The greatest objection to the existence of God is often expressed this way..."If God is all-knowing, powerful and good (as you Bible believers say He is) why He would allow so much evil and suffering? Matthew reports evil in the extreme because no crime was greater than the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Though Jesus had the power to stop evil in its tracks, He endured all of this for you and me. When we comprehend His sacrifice and His love for us, the problem of evil is seen in an entirely different light. For now we see that the true problem of evil is our problem, not God's.

But because of His great love, God intervened and made our problem His problem. Filled with sin and morally guilty before God, the question we now face is not how God can justify Himself to us, but how can we be justified before Him. How can God resolve the evil in us that separates us from Him?

The solution is declared so clearly in **II Cor. 5:21 - God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

So paradoxically, even though the problem of evil is the greatest objection to the existence of God, at the end of the day, God is the only solution to the problem of evil. If God doesn't exist, we are lost and without hope in a world filled with evil and suffering. God is the final answer to the problem of evil. Through faith in Christ who suffered and died in our place, He redeems us from evil, gives us a new heart and takes us into the everlasting joy of an incomparably good fellowship with Himself. But He can only do this for those who believe Him and trust Him to save them. Have you trusted Jesus to remove and resolve the evil in your own heart? He's eager to save you, but you must ask Him to.