

**“The Path to the Cross:
Silent, Innocent, and Condemned”
Matthew 27:1-2, 11-26
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Main Question: Why did Jesus die on the cross?

Jesus is silent.

1. For the most part, Jesus kept a silent dignity before his accusers. In the face of such composure, Pilate was *“greatly amazed”* (v. 14).
2. But Jesus was not entirely silent. Some questions were legitimate and deserved to be answered.
 - a. When the High Priest, the religious leader, demanded to know if Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus answered, *“You have said so.”*
 - b. When Pilate asked Jesus if He was the King of the Jews, Jesus answered, *“You have said so.”*
3. The High Priest Caiaphas and Pilate had legitimate questions according to their positions as leaders in the religious and political spheres. It was important and appropriate for Jesus to answer them. But for the false accusations, Jesus refused to dignify them with a reply.

Jesus is innocent.

1. Judas knew that Jesus was innocent. He brought back the 30 pieces of silver he was paid for betraying Jesus and told the chief priests and elders, *“I have sinned by betraying innocent blood”* (v. 4).
2. Pilate’s wife knew Jesus was innocent. Because of a disturbing dream, she sent Pilate an urgent message while he was sitting on the judgment seat, saying, *“have nothing to do with that righteous man”* (v. 19).
3. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent. From his questioning, Pilate found nothing in Jesus worthy of death. Even after the crowd shouted for Jesus’ death, Pilate asked, *“Why, what evil has he done?”* (v. 23).

Jesus is condemned.

1. Knowing his innocence, Pilate tried to release Jesus by asking the crowd to pick which prisoner to release, Jesus or Barabbas. Because Jesus was popular, Pilate thought they would select Jesus. He was wrong. The crowd roared for the release of Barabbas.

- a. Along with the religious leaders, the crowd added their voice to the chorus of cries to release Barabbas and to condemn Jesus to death. It is the crowd that first uttered the words, *“Let him be crucified!”*
2. The crowd’s choice perfectly illustrates the doctrine of substitutionary atonement—that Christ took the place of the sinner, substituting himself, the just for the unjust, to bring forgiveness and salvation to those who would believe in him.

“So it is in the salvation of our souls. We are all by nature like Barabbas and deserve God’s wrath and condemnation; yet he was accounted righteous and set free. The Lord Jesus Christ is perfectly innocent, and yet he is counted a sinner and put to death that we may live. Christ suffers though guiltless, that we may be pardoned. We are pardoned though guilty, because of what Christ does for us. We are sinners and yet counted righteous. Christ is righteous yet counted a sinner. Happy is that man who understands this doctrine and has laid hold on it by faith for the salvation of his soul.” —J.C. Ryle

3. Pilate was a weak, unprincipled leader. He never found or pronounced Jesus guilty and never officially condemned him. Still, he delivered Jesus over to the soldiers to be flogged and crucified.

Who is to blame?

1. Certainly the Jewish religious leaders and their partners in the crowd that called for him to be crucified share blame.
2. And even though Pilate symbolically washed his hands of Jesus’ blood, he is also to blame.
3. And then there were the Roman soldiers who carried out the flogging and crucifixion. They were guilty, too.
4. But when you consider all that Scripture says about His death, you must conclude that it was your sin and my sin that nailed him to the cross. If he was wounded for our transgressions, if he was crushed for our iniquities, if the suffering and death that fell upon him was for our salvation, forgiveness and peace, then we are to blame.

*“I nailed him to the tree;
I crucified the Christ of God;
I joined the mockery
Of all that shouting multitude
I feel that I am one;
And in that din of voices rude
I recognize my own
Around the cross the throng I see,*

*Mocking the Sufferer's groan;
Yet still my voice it seems to be
As if I mocked alone."*

—Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

Fellowship Starters:

1. Although He was completely innocent and righteous, why was it necessary for Jesus to die?
2. How did God use the crowd's evil desires to accomplish His perfect plan of salvation?
3. How does the crowd's choice to release Barabbas and condemn Jesus illustrate the truth of substitutionary atonement?
4. Horatio Bonar once wrote, *"I nailed him to the tree; I crucified the Christ of God; I joined the mockery..."* How is your sin to blame for Christ's death?
5. How can a reflection on Jesus taking our place to bring salvation, forgiveness and peace move you to bow your heart in gratefulness and worship for such a costly sacrifice and such infinite love?