

## Matthew 27 • A Study in Contrasts

### Introduction

There are a host of potential Bible studies in this chapter. Because Matthew is devoted to establishing that Jesus is nothing less than the Messiah, the King of the Jews, we are going to undertake a single slice of study by examining all the different types of personalities listed and how each one deals with Jesus. We are presented with a very wide variety of reactions of different people and groups when it comes to their position on who they believe Jesus to be and what they should do about it. Like the Parable of the Sower, the examples of those rejecting the Word are far greater than those in obedience. But this is invaluable insight for us to understand what to expect as we ourselves sow God's Word in lives which react so differently across such a wide spectrum of emotions from the most passionate on one end to total indifference on the other.

<sup>1</sup>Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death; <sup>2</sup>and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor.

<sup>3</sup>Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, <sup>4</sup>saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."

But they said, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!"

<sup>5</sup>And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.

<sup>6</sup>The chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood." <sup>7</sup>And they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers. <sup>8</sup>For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

<sup>9</sup>Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "AND THEY TOOK THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER, THE PRICE OF THE ONE WHOSE PRICE HAD BEEN SET by the sons of Israel; <sup>10</sup>AND THEY GAVE THEM FOR THE POTTER'S FIELD, AS THE LORD DIRECTED ME."

### [Read v.1-10: Jesus & Judas]

**Q: There are those who have proposed that Judas is some kind of hero for making sure prophecy would be fulfilled. How did Christ Himself describe Judas?**

A: As "a devil" (Jn. 6:70) and "the son of perdition" (Jn. 17:12) – an allusion to someone determined to remain spiritually lost and associated with destruction. But of particular importance is Jesus' statement that Judas never really believed in Christ.

**Observation:** There are only two people in Scripture who are both called "the son of perdition" (2 Th. 2:3) and who are both **satanically** (not merely demonically) possessed – Judas and the Antichrist. (Jn. 13:27; 2 Th. 2:9; Rev. 13:2)

*"But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.*

— John 6:64

**Q: What might be telling by the fact that Judas returned the money?**

A: We know that money was a huge motivating factor where Judas is concerned. (Mt. 26:15; Jn. 12:6) Judas' remorse is expressed to his collaborators in sin, not to Christ in an act of true repentance.

**Q: Who else in this chapter betrays Jesus and how is that contrasted with Judas?**

A: Peter. Both offer a kind of repentance, but Judas proved his repentance to be false by committing another sin; Peter proved his repentance to be true by serving the Lord faithfully going forward.

**Q: In Judas' case, why might he have been robbed of the ability to actually repent and avoid suicide?**

A: Judas rejected the truth and believed a lie so severe it allowed him to be possessed by Satan (Jn. 13:27), who is described in Scripture as "a murderer" (Jn. 8:44). He depicts the inevitable destination of living with unaddressed personal sin.

**Q: In the previous chapter when Judas led those who arrested Jesus, what revealed Judas' own view of who Jesus was?**

A: Judas addressed Jesus not as "Lord", but "Rabbi". (Mt. 26:25) He did not see Jesus as anything more than a teacher, a mere man.

**Point:** So when Judas confessed, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood”, he still may not have been acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah but merely as a man he wronged.

**Q: How does the purchase of the Potter’s Field contrast Jesus and Judas?**

A: Both fulfilled prophecy, one for good, the other for evil.

**Q: What is the contrast of the results of their respective deaths?**

A: Christ’s death purchased the redemption of the world; Judas’ death purchased a place for the dead.

**Application:** Judas is an example of someone who, because they never actually repented and believed to begin with, realize the truth of their spiritual condition too late to do anything about it.

### **[Read v.11-19: Jesus & Pilate]**

**Q: What is the common behavior of Pilate as recorded in all the Gospel accounts?**

A: Pilate exhibited great restlessness and indecision. He repeatedly questioned Jesus between going out to the crowd, someone who appears caught in the middle.

**Q: What does this tell us about Pilate? What is his basic, spiritual problem?**

A: He is trying to avoid making a decision about Christ. In fact, he appeared to want someone else, even the crowd, to make it for him.

**Point:** No one can avoid making a decision about Christ; eventually a choice is made by everyone in the end.

**Q: In what respects are Pilate and Judas identical?**

A: Both found Jesus to be innocent as a man, but neither accepted Him as their Savior.

**Q: What served as a second witness corroborating what Pilate’s conscience was already telling him?**

A: The warning from his wife. In spite of his own conscience and his wife’s supernatural dream, Pilate still chose to give Christ over to be crucified.

**Application:** Pilate is an example of someone who does not want to deal with the issue of Christ, someone not openly for or against. When it comes to Christ, there is no option to be neutral as sooner or later each individual is forced to decide.

### **[Read v.20-26: Jesus & Barabbas]**

**Q: What does the name “Barabbas” actually mean?**

A: It literally means “son of the father”.

**Q: How is this obviously ironic in this situation?**

A: The true Son of the Father is being rejected for an earthly substitute.

**Q: How would you characterize Barabbas compared to Jesus?**

A: Jesus was innocent, Barabbas was guilty.

<sup>11</sup>Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, “Are You the King of the Jews?”

And Jesus said to him, “It is as you say.”

<sup>12</sup>And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer. <sup>13</sup>Then Pilate said to Him, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?”

<sup>14</sup>And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so the governor was quite amazed.

<sup>15</sup>Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the people any one prisoner whom they wanted. <sup>16</sup>At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. <sup>17</sup>So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” <sup>18</sup>For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over.

<sup>19</sup>While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message, saying, “Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him.”

<sup>20</sup>But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death.

<sup>21</sup>But the governor said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?”

And they said, “Barabbas.”

<sup>22</sup>Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?”

They all said, “Crucify Him!”

<sup>23</sup>And he said, “Why, what evil has He done?”

But they kept shouting all the more, saying, “Crucify Him!”

<sup>24</sup>When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this Man’s blood; see to that yourselves.”

<sup>25</sup>And all the people said, “His blood shall be on us and on our children!”

<sup>26</sup>Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

<sup>27</sup>Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him.

<sup>28</sup>They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. <sup>29</sup>And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” <sup>30</sup>They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head.

<sup>31</sup>After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.

<sup>32</sup>As they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross.

**Q: Why would this exchange of Jesus for Barabbas be particularly powerful in Old Testament terms?**

A: It literally mirrors what took place on the Day of Atonement when two goats were selected, one sacrificed for sin and the other set free.

**Q: What is the most obvious difference between Barabbas and Jesus?**

A: Barabbas was guilty, Jesus was innocent.

**Application:** Barabbas symbolizes the fact that Christ died in the place of *all* sinners, even a murderer like Barabbas. If we were the only sinner in the history of the world, Christ would have gone to the cross just for us.

### **[Read v.27-31: Jesus & the Soldiers]**

**Q: How did the Roman soldiers treat Jesus?**

A: With both physical persecution and scorn and mocking. Their personal attacks were highly focused where the issue of His Messiahship was concerned. He was not taunted as a criminal.

**Q: What is ironic about their actions?**

A: They clothed and crowned Jesus the King **as** a king. It is the ultimate scorn and foolishness of man where the truth is concerned.

**Application:** The soldiers represent unbelievers who not only outwardly persecute Christ (and His followers) but take every public opportunity to mock and speak against Him (and His followers).

### **[Read v.32: Jesus & Simon]**

**Q: What was the greater reason why a convict had to carry their cross in public to the site of the crucifixion?**

A: It was done as a public testimony of guilt. This is why someone other than Jesus had to carry His cross – He was not guilty, and provides a deeper understanding of what Jesus means when He commands followers to “*deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me*”. (Mt. 16:24)

**Q: What might be important about the fact that Simon is identified as “a man of Cyrene”?**

A: Involved with Jesus’ crucifixion are not just Jews and Romans but a Cyrene, which means that representatives from all the nations of the earth are present in that these are descendants of Ham, Shem, and Japheth, the sons of Noah from who the biblical table of nations comes from. (Gen. 10) From God’s point of view in how He sees and catalogs history, everyone from the whole earth was represented in these events.

**Application:** While most of the figures in this chapter represent different aspects of rejection, Simon represents the indisputable example of accepting the defining work of the Messiah by taking up the cross of Christ.

<sup>33</sup>And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, <sup>34</sup>they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.

<sup>35</sup>And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots. <sup>36</sup>And sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there. <sup>37</sup>And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS."

<sup>38</sup>At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. <sup>39</sup>And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads <sup>40</sup>and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

<sup>41</sup>In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, <sup>42</sup>"He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. <sup>43</sup>HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE Him now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

<sup>44</sup>The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

<sup>45</sup>Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour.

<sup>46</sup>About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"

<sup>47</sup>And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, "This man is calling for Elijah."

<sup>48</sup>Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink. <sup>49</sup>But the rest of them said, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him."

## [Read v.33-49: Jesus & the Spectators]

**Q: For the different groups present at the crucifixion, what are the three basic reactions to Christ?**

1. The soldiers gamble for Christ's earthly possessions.
2. The Jews revile Christ.
3. The others sit and stare at Him.

**Point:** These basically represent the full range of responses for unbelievers: those who try to usurp the things of Christ, those who outright revile and deny Him, and those who think they can remain neutral or unattached. It is the same range of actions taken by Judas, the authorities, and Pilate leading up to the crucifixion.

**Q: What are the two basic offices of the Messiah which they directly ridicule?**

1. Jesus the Messiah as Prophet, offering that His prophecy concerning the temple was going unfulfilled (v.40); and
2. Jesus the Messiah as King, repeatedly laughing at the notion of His Kingship (v.37, 42).

**Point:** Jesus is never put on trial for any sign or wonder performed in the course of His ministry; it comes down to the question of whether or not He is the Messiah as it always does. What is always on trial where Christ is concerned is His Word.

**Q: What is probably the ultimate combination of insult and rejection offered among all those rendered?**

A: When the chief priests, scribes, and elders state, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself...let Him come down from the cross". (v.41-42)

**Point:** This is the problem with signs and wonders: they are never believed by those who refuse to accept the greater message accompanying them. These authorities actually acknowledge all the signs and miracles Jesus did in the course of His earthly ministry, but because they reject His Word in the end they cannot accept the signs as authenticating His message. They would not believe Him even if He **did** miraculously come down from the cross before their very eyes.

**Q: What Scripture is obviously being fulfilled before their very eyes?**

A: Psalm 22, identified even by Hebrew scholars of that era (and all subsequent ones), was recognized as a Messianic Psalm speaking about the Messiah.

**Point:** The fact that they could not connect the events they were witnessing to the very Scripture being fulfilled is a powerful testimony to their spiritual blindness. People who are disobedient to God's Word in general are incapable of realizing the fulfillment of God's Word when it happens.

**Application:** Here we are presented with the most basic root of unbelief, the inability to accept Christ on His terms while claiming to need "something else" before they will believe. Because God's Word is not enough for them, not even the most obvious, visible signs of the fulfillment of His Word are not enough to change their heart, whether it is inclined like the soldiers to take something away from Christ, or like the Jews to openly despise and revile Christ, or like the others who choose to sit idly by.

<sup>50</sup>And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. <sup>51</sup>And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. <sup>52</sup>The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; <sup>53</sup>and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

<sup>54</sup>Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

<sup>55</sup>Many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him. <sup>56</sup>Among them was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

<sup>57</sup>When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. <sup>58</sup>This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. <sup>59</sup>And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, <sup>60</sup>and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. <sup>61</sup>And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave.

<sup>62</sup>Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, <sup>63</sup>and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' <sup>64</sup>Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last

### [Read v.50-54: Jesus & the Signs]

**Q: What is striking about the signs which occurred at the moment of Jesus' death?**

1. The veil was torn to testify that Christ as High Priest opened "a *new and living way*" to God (Heb. 10:19-25), a very strong proof to His religious persecutors.
2. The earthquakes and accompanying commotion testify to His Lordship over the natural realm, a very strong proof to those who thought they could just sit idly by.
3. The resurrection of the dead testify to the fact He is King both of the living and the dead, a very strong proof to **everyone** regardless of their previous position on Christ.

**Q: How does the testimony of the centurion actually serve as an additional sign?**

A: He seems to be the only one who in the course of witnessing signs and wonders actually accepts the greater message behind them, that Jesus "was the Son of God!" (v.54)

**Application:** *The centurion represents those who are capable of understanding signs because they accept the greater message represented.*

### [Read v.55-61: Jesus & His Friends]

**Q: Jesus has been repeatedly handled physically by many people to this point. What is different in this respect from here on out?**

A: Once He had finished the work of redemption, Christ was never again touched by enemy hands. All those who touch Him both in death and resurrection are only those who love and believe in Him.

**Q: We know from the parallel account in John that it was both Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who prepared Jesus' body and laid Him in the tomb. How was this actually a fulfillment of Scripture?**

*His grave was assigned with wicked men,  
Yet He was with a rich man in His death,  
Because He had done no violence,  
Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.*

— Isaiah 53:9

**Application:** *Only those who love and believe in Christ are allowed to enter into a personal relationship with Him. How Believers handle the work of Christ's death on the cross is directly reflected in their participation in the power of His resurrection.*

### [Read v.62-66: Jesus & His Enemies]

**Q: What might be alarming at this point if we compare the knowledge and actions of Jesus' enemies with those of His disciples?**

A: Jesus' enemies seem to remember what His followers forgot, that He promised to rise from the dead in three days.

**Q: How is their perception of Christ made clear?**

A: They refer to Him as "that deceiver" (v.63).

deception will be worse than the first.”

<sup>65</sup>Pilate said to them, “You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how.”

<sup>66</sup>And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.

**Q: Why is this particularly ironic where these Jewish authorities are concerned?**

A: One day they will make a covenant with the ultimate deceiver, the Antichrist, the ultimate legacy of having been blind to the true Christ.

**Application:** *These represent the many enemies Christ who are fully aware of God's Word and are consciously and willfully working against Him in the same way that Satan has shown himself to be versed in God's Word but still actively at work against Him.*

### **Overall Application**

*The Gospel of Matthew is devoted to establishing Jesus as the Messiah, the King of the Jews. Herein we are provided with one of the widest spectrums of response to that question. Every single person must come to terms with the Person of Christ, and every Christian rightly embracing Him is charged with bringing it before everyone else **regardless** of how the message is received.*