

Behold the Man

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[0 : 0 0] turn again with me to Matthew chapter 27 and verses 11 through 26 perhaps to focus our minds on a particular verse those words we find in verse 22 what shall I do then with Jesus who is called Christ Pilate asked not only upon every Sabbath but upon every day Pilate's question may be asked of every man whom will he choose sin the murderer of his soul or the Lord Jesus Christ the chiefest among 10,000 and altogether lovely so wrote Lachlan McKenzie minister of Lough Caron of yesteryear every day he writes

Pilate's question may be asked at every man whom will he choose this is a passage all about choices the choice the choice Pilate made to release Barabbas and crucify Jesus the choice the people of Jerusalem made to condemn and kill their Messiah and the choice Jesus made to willingly and silently die on the cross for the sins of his people it's a passage all about choices which means that it's passage for today because every one of us every day every day has a choice to make will you choose to crucify Jesus all over again by rejecting him as Savior and Lord or will you choose to follow Jesus by believing that he went to the cross to take away your sins who then will you choose who then will you choose today there are two choices in this passage the choice to kill and the choice to die by the end of the sermon

I hope you see that the choices made in this passage though made by people thousands of years ago and thousands of miles away our choices that we must all make here and now the choice to crucify Jesus afresh or the choice to believe in Jesus as Lord and at the very end I'm going to leave you with Lachlan McKenzie's searching statement Pilate's question may be asked of every man whom will he choose first of all then they chose to kill they chose to kill sadly this is a passage which is full of killers men and perhaps women also who though they may not directly have crucified Jesus were accomplices to his murder they chose the verdict of death by crucifixion not only did they choose to kill Jesus but they chose the most inhumane form of execution imaginable a form of execution reserved only for the vilest of criminals they chose to kill now we may say that these are events which happened so long ago that they can have no possible significance for us here today but they do because the questions to be asked are the same for us as for them whom will you choose to a man everyone present that day chose Jesus' death from Pilate to Barabbas from the religious leaders to the people of Jerusalem they were all complicit in his crucifixion every one of them an accomplice in the most notorious lynching in history but why?

why when asked who they would rather have released to them did the religious authorities choose Barabbas? why did the crowd choose crucifixion as the method of execution?

and why did Pilate who knew that Jesus was innocent of the crimes of which he had been accused condemn him to death? motive you see is all important the means will be the cross the opportunity will be today but what are the motives which hold this crime together?

[5 : 0 4] and for us as God draws us back to Matthew 27 and causes us to stand in that square as we listen to Pilate's question there in verse 22 what should motivate us to reject Jesus and kill him all over again?

well it seems to me that there are four motives attached to the four different groups in this story envy, cowardice, hysteria and necessity envy first of all envy if you want to rank the participants on a scale of 1 to 10 of guilt the most culpable of Jesus' death were the religious authorities of Israel the Pharisees, the Sadducees the so-called elders of the people they had convicted Jesus in a sham trial upon the testimony of men they knew were lying all the way through Jesus' ministry they had tried to trick him asked him impossible questions set him impossible tasks give him impossible choices but Jesus had mastered them at every step but finally having bribed one of his own disciples they caught up with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane but having themselves convicted Jesus of a capital crime under Jewish law they were not allowed to execute him themselves they had to refer the matter to a high authority to pilot the Roman proconsul of their day now let's be clear who these men actually were because underneath all the religious talk and the religious masks they were as John the Baptist calls them a brood of vipers or as Jesus called them hypocrites a pilot may have been a rather gormless man but he wasn't a stupid man he knew very well why these religious authorities had handed Jesus over to them in verse 18 we read he knew it was out of envy they had handed him over to him the ultimate reason that these religious authorities hated Jesus and conspired to kill him was because they envied him they were jealous of him they envied everything about him but especially his popularity among the common man we read in another place that the common man heard him gladly and that wasn't true for these religious authorities in Jerusalem or the ordinary man feared them the ordinary man obeyed them but the ordinary man did not love them nor flocked to hear them preaching ordinary people from all over Israel traveled long distances to witness Jesus healing the sick making the lame walk they cheered when he fed them with bread and fish they were amazed when he gave these religious authorities amazing answers to the hard questions he had been set the ultimate issue is that these religious authorities just didn't want to lose control to Jesus they didn't want to lose the privilege of power it's not just that they didn't trust Jesus it's more that they themselves did not want control of their nation to slip out of their hands they wanted to be in charge of their own nation to set their own agenda to do what they wanted to do they didn't want anyone getting in the way of what they wanted to do and that's the issue for many people who hear the gospel but reject Jesus that's why they choose to reject him again and again and again not because there's anything untrue or unattractive about the gospel it's just that they do not want to give up control of their own lives to another namely Jesus they don't want someone else to have the right over their lives to tell them what to do what not to do to determine the course

of their lives to be on the throne of their hearts there may be certain lifestyles which are inconsistent with being a Christian and this kind of person just doesn't want to give up these inconsistent lifestyles they want to do what they want to do they don't want to give control all of their lives over to someone else and so when offered Barabbas instead of Jesus they'll choose Barabbas every time not because they think Barabbas is innocent or that Jesus is guilty but simply because they want to get on with their own lives without any interference from God envy the second motive is cowardice cowardice out of cowardice Pilate chose to kill Jesus out of cowardice this Roman governor was the most powerful man in Judea behind him lay the vast might of the Roman Empire with its legions and its laws and its culture at that time

Tiberius was emperor in Rome and Pilate was his representative in Judea he was a very shrewd man who once again valued power over principle it seems apparent from our passage that Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent of the charges being brought against him Pilate was too canny an operator to be fooled by the transparency of the religious leaders of Israel he knew why they wanted Jesus dead and it had nothing to do with Jesus being guilty he knew there were religious battles going on behind the scenes in verse 11 he asks Jesus are you the king of the Jews now perhaps this question would be better translated in this way you are you the king of the Jews remember standing before Pilate isn't a tall impressive man with a regal bearing wearing the robes of authority but an exhausted man worn out by an all night trial a man broken by betrayal and denial a man who has already been punched kicked slapped and spat upon a tortured man a tortured man clearly this broken man standing in front of Pilate is no threat to the mighty power of Rome

Pilate knows it only too well you are king so Pilate's wife pleads with him have nothing to do with Jesus perhaps here we see another aspect of Pilate's foolishness one should never ignore the advice of one's wife he knew Jesus was no threat he knew that he was being used as a pawn by these religious men of Israel he thought he was being clever by bringing out Barabbas and offering the choice to the crowd in his foolishness he thought that faced with such a choice the crowd would choose Jesus but when it didn't when it chose Barabbas instead a man who was guilty and was a real threat to the security of Rome's power in Judea Pilate caved in and showed his true nature he's a coward he's afraid he washes his hands of the responsibility he'd rather shelve his principles than lose his power he'd rather lose his honor than lose his reputation now again

[13 : 22] I've met many people like this people who reject Jesus because they're afraid of what others might say to them or others might say of them they themselves are convinced of who Jesus is and of the truth of the Christian gospel but they're desperately afraid of being singled out for ridicule in school in university in the workplace at home what all my friends say when they hear I become a Christian and so to keep the peace in their minds anyway they reject Jesus they want to fit in not to stand out and sort of cowardice they turn away from Jesus and they wash their hands of him they listen to Pilate's question they choose Barabbas third third motive why they chose to kill Jesus out of necessity out of necessity Barabbas was a very dangerous man he was not just a robber if that's all he was then perhaps we could be sympathetic to him the reality is that he was a murderer and a terrorist probably an extreme

Jewish nationalist he had probably murdered some senior figures in the Judean nobility who had been suspected of collaborating with the Romans perhaps he had killed some of the members of the Sanhedrin or at least some of those who were connected to it but maybe he was not so ideologically motivated after all extremist causes attract dangerous people people who are just looking for a legitimate excuse for violence politics and religion drive some people to murder but also give those who are already murderers a label to justify their murderous tendencies that's Barabbas he is a violent dangerous terrorist who deserves the sentence of crucifixion that's been handed down to him make no bones about it at all so for him it must have been a terrible surprise when he's taken from his cell paraded before the crowds and the choices presented to them of either him or

Jesus being released presumably Barabbas knew little or nothing about Jesus Jesus was not involved in the nationalist movement in any way so perhaps to Barabbas he was an irrelevance but put yourself in Barabbas sandals for a moment either he dies or Jesus dies both could not live and out of necessity of self interest Barabbas prayed that it would be him the crowd would choose to be released and for Jesus even though other people say he's an innocent man to be condemned and crucified and again regrettably I've met many people like this people who reject Jesus out of the necessity of self interest perhaps they've been professing Christians for some time but then something gets in the way up until that point it was plain sailing for them as

Christians but then for some reason there comes a fork in the road a choice their career or their Christianity a particular relationship or their Christianity a lifestyle choice or their Christianity and they're torn but out of necessity of self interest they choose themselves they choose that career path or promotion or particular relationship or lifestyle choice even though they know it means their faith in Jesus will suffer are there any like that among us here today in Glasgow City can you meet Lachlan McKenzie's challenge Pilate's question may be asked at every man yes even Barabbas whom will they choose who have you chosen and why and then lastly here in this first point the fourth reason why some may reject Jesus is out of hysteria out of hysteria one might wonder why these people of Jerusalem who so recently had cried out in praise of Jesus and had shouted

Hosanna to the son of David when he rode into Jerusalem now cry out crucify him well people are fickle and we change our minds quicker than the weather even in Glasgow depending on who we spoke to last I think on this occasion the people who greeted Jesus as he entered the city were very different from those who are gathered here in the public square in Matthew 27 these here in Matthew 27 are the political classes they are residents of Jerusalem as opposed to the common people and the visitors to Jerusalem for the Passover festival it was the latter group who had greeted Jesus so eagerly a few days before nevertheless it was the people of Jerusalem who having been whipped up into hysteria by the religious authorities cried out crucify him they don't know much about Jesus other than that their leaders don't like him but rather than carefully and calmly listening to

[19 : 21] Jesus the facts of the case learning about who he was in a frenzied and thinking hysteria they call for his death like sheep following a crazy shepherd they're being whipped up to reject Jesus like dead fish they are simply going with the flow and yes but out of all the reasons why people reject Jesus I think this is the most common in our day or any day the pendulum has swung so far away from Christianity in Scotland that to be an atheist or worse than agnostic is now cool the voices of secular atheism shout so loud that they whip our people up against Jesus oh that Jesus he's bigoted and narrow minded that Jesus he's anti scientific he's antiquarian deplatform him cancel him ridicule him reject him without even hearing what he has to say for himself just follow the crowd just allow yourself to be whipped up into this unthinking frenzied hysteria rather than carefully and calmly considering the facts of the case so many tens of thousands of our countrymen fall into this category crying out crucify him disregarding the consequences on no other basis than that they're following the crowd sad sad sad that our society has fallen to the foolishness that the loudest voice is always right even if it is most certainly wrong as long as the crowd follows

Barabbas out of the pack mentality out of hysteria they'll reject Jesus and they'll choose Barabbas too I'm afraid I've encountered every one of these four reasons for rejecting Jesus envy cowardice necessity and hysteria but the thing is they all amount to the same thing at the end of the day Lachlan Mackenzie challenges us saying whom will he choose who will you choose and all these four reasons boil down to this one choice they've chosen Barabbas they chose to kill Jesus over and over and over again trouble is of course they've forgotten the words of Jesus in Matthew 16 25 whoever will save his life will lose it whoever loses his life for my sake in the gospel will find it ah they've saved their lives now by killing

Jesus what of the future they all chose to kill him then they still do today they chose to kill well secondly and briefly they chose to kill he chose to die he chose to die I don't get tired of saying it even if you get tired of hearing it the central character in every passage of the gospels is Jesus Christ it isn't Pilate it's not the leaders of Israel it's not the people of Israel it's not Barabbas it's Jesus we enter this passage with a Jesus battered and bruised by the Jewish mob we leave this passage with Jesus being flogged by the Roman soldiers from here on in it's all suffering with no deprive it's all darkness with no light everyone in this passage is interested in self preservation

Pilate rejects Jesus in order to preserve his position as Roman proconsul the leaders of Israel reject Jesus in order to preserve their positions as leaders Barabbas rejects Jesus in order to preserve his life the people reject Jesus in order to preserve their reputation with everyone else the only person in this passage who is not interested in self preservation is Jesus he does not choose to kill he chooses to die he is not acting out of self interest in any way shape or form rather he endures the suffering because he is interested not in self preservation but in our salvation he exists entirely for the other his interest is entirely focused on others if he had so chosen at any point in this sham trial he could have called on heaven's power to rescue him and destroy his enemies however he chooses to stand alone before this cowardly man and accept the condemnation of an unthinking mob he chooses to walk the path of the cross not because in it there is self interest but because without the cross there would be no salvation the others all chose to live for themselves and Jesus chose to die for them they chose to reject him but he chose to open up his arms on the cross and embrace a hostile world and love and the question comes of course who exactly is Jesus dying for who is he dying for whose salvation is he suffering to win he's choosing to die for those who are rejecting him he is suffering and dying to win sinners back to himself those who by nature are dominated by self interest and constantly reject him out of envy cowardice necessity and hysteria he's dying for the

Sanhedrins and the Pilate's and the Barabbas's and the crowds of his day and ours he's choosing to die for those who are choosing to kill him let's put Lachlan McKenzie's question to Jesus shall we Pilate's question may be asked at every man whom will he choose that's Lachlan McKenzie's question and at every stage of his suffering and his passion Jesus answers Lachlan McKenzie and says I'll choose them I'll choose those envious religious bigots and I'll choose those cowardly proconsuls and I'll choose the downright vicious of this world and I'll choose those who are calling out for my death let their blood be on my head I'll pay the price for their sin father forgive them they do not know what they are doing as you read this passage through those spectacles those of a

[26 : 44] Jesus who's determined to love the loveless and to die for them on the cross your heart is strangely warmed because you see yourself in that crowd crying out for Jesus death and you realize that although it's you who deserves the punishment of the cross that because he loves you Jesus took your place he bore your punishment and died your death we may have chosen to live for ourselves but Jesus chose to die for us the envious the cowardly the vicious the hysterics he chose to die for you now a word in closing to those of us who are Christians but who are struggling with doubts and fears and various anxieties and there are many of us in that camp who worry about everything about yesterday and today and tomorrow about ourselves and about others about what we think about what we say about what we do we are nervous wrecks obsessed with anxiety

Jesus stood alone Jesus suffered alone Jesus died alone for you he will never abandon you in your hour of greatest need you may abandon him he will never forsake you if God has given his one and only son to such a horrible death for you don't you suppose that he loves you enough to be with you and to care for you and to stand alongside you in every situation you face and in your anxiety Lachlan Mackenzie's question may be put to you also part of question may be asked of every man whom will he choose in your doubts and your fears and in your anxieties will you choose to trust in the

Jesus who first chose you and suffered for you and died for you when you wake up in the morning make it your first thought your first resolve today I will choose Jesus over my own doubts and fears and anxieties ultimately whoever we are today we must choose Jesus because Jesus chose us first he chose to suffer for us he chose to die for us he chose to be crucified for his crucifiers he chose us before he chose himself not only upon every Sabbath but upon every day part of his question may be asked at every man whom will he choose sin the murderer of his soul or the

Lord Jesus Christ the chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely amen