

Freed by Innocence

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[0 : 00] I grew up with my nose bleeding a lot for reasons that don't matter, but it was frequent enough for me to think that every person, not just me, had blood in their nose all the time.

That's just what I thought. Every person. In fact, in year 8 or year 9, I can't remember, I actually got into a heated argument with a friend about it, arguing, yes they do, every person has it. His name was Mitch, and Mitch was actually a bit of a dodgy character. I'd been to school with Mitch Shint Prep. I knew him pretty well, so add to that that I was sure, like sure, that everyone has blood in their nose.

I mean, how can they not? I have blood in my nose every day, and just because I can't see yours, Mitch, or you claim there isn't, you're just a filthy liar, I know.

I wonder if you've ever known like I did in that situation. In today's passage, we're going to see a bit of this going on.

[1 : 10] Some people who already know, if only everyone else could see it too. We pick up from last week in the courtyard of the high priest.

Do you remember? Peter had run out in tears, not just ditching, but pretending to not even know his friend, his master.

What a dog. How could he do it? Well, let's set the scene. Peter sat there for a while because the council needed to sit and determine Jesus' fate, but not until morning.

And until then, Jesus was being looked after by some lovely guards. Just have a look at verse 63. The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him.

They blindfolded him and demanded, prophesy, who hit you? And they said many other insulting things. We heard in the previous passage that Peter was sitting for at least an hour, probably more.

[2 : 17] And what was happening during all this time? Jesus was being beaten up. And Peter could see it happening. Are you surprised that Peter responded the way he did?

This is where Luke brings us in. After a good while of this going on, daybreak. The council convenes, Jesus was brought in so they could find a basis to put him to death.

Have a look at verse 66. At daybreak, the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law met together, and Jesus was led before them.

If you are the Messiah, they said, tell us. Jesus was brought before quite a big group, the whole council of elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, to question Jesus.

Now, was it a fair hearing? No way. They already knew the truth about Jesus.

[3 : 27] They were just looking for confirmation. And what do they ask? Verse 67 again. If you are the Messiah, tell us. Jesus answered, if I tell you, you will not believe.

And if I asked you, you would not answer. This isn't the first time that Jewish leaders have asked Jesus, straight out about his authority, who he is, and how he's doing this stuff.

But when he's answered previously, they've been unwilling to engage, or admit that they simply don't accept that his teaching comes from God.

This was seen in a recent discussion that he'd had with them. I wonder if you remember his discussion about his authority and the teaching of John the Baptist.

But before they go on, he says more in verse 69. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God. They will ask, are you the Son of God then?

[4 : 34] He replied, you say that I am. Then they said, why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips. Jesus responds by calling himself the Son of Man.

This is his preferred title. And their response is interesting. He calls himself Son of Man, and they respond as though he calls himself Son of God.

Now both these phrases can mean human or humanity, but here both parties take it to mean something much more significant. And even though Jesus responds to their question, not with a flat out yes, it's not a no, and their response proves they took it as affirmative.

And so they're like, we've got what they need. We've got what we need. Let's take our proof to the governor, which is just what they do. Verse 1, next chapter, then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate, and they began to accuse him, saying, we have found this man subverting our nation.

He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king. Now I wonder what you think of their tactics. Yes, Jesus has come to Jerusalem on a king.

[5 : 49] We saw that previously, coming in on a donkey. But what's the chance of Pilate thinking him as a king? And I wonder if you remember Jesus teaching about paying taxes to Caesar when they asked him.

Can anyone remember? They said, what do you think about that? And Jesus said, give to Caesar what is Caesar's. So they're just flat out lying about it.

So Pilate chats to Jesus. He asks him about being king. Jesus responds the same. Not yes, but not no. And so how does it pan out for the Jewish leaders?

Well, not too well, unfortunately. Pilate finds no basis for a charge. Oh, shouldn't have started out so strong. What are they going to do?

Are they going to pull out? No, they're going to have another crack. He's been tearing up Galilee as well, they say. Well, that's when Pilate finds out that this isn't even his responsibility.

[6 : 55] So what does he do? He sends him off to Herod. Now we've heard already that Herod has interest in Jesus. He's eager to see and hear him.

And today's the day. Have a look at verse eight. When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased because for a long time, he'd been wanting to see him. From what he'd heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort.

He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave no answer. Last time we heard from Herod was way back in, chapter 13. Back then, the ever helpful Pharisees told Jesus to flee because Herod wanted to kill him.

And prior to that, Herod only wanted to see Jesus because he was intrigued, saying something like, didn't I kill John already? Who is this? So Herod was keen to see him, but did he have wholesome motives?

I don't think so. He wanted to see what Jesus could do. What was all the fuss about? It says he asked him questions. What did he ask? Well, we don't know.

[8 : 02] It doesn't say. Do a backflip? Pull a bunny out of a hat? Probably not. Maybe one of the miracles he'd heard about. Teach us something that he used to hear John teach about.

Something about life or scripture. A few years ago, a guy called Weird Al came to town.

Has anyone ever heard of Weird Al? Yeah, a few of the older people. Sorry, sorry about that, Oscar. A few of the weird people.

He came to town. He's a musician. He sings parodies. He was being interviewed on the radio. I'm a fan of Weird Al. And he was answering questions from callers. There's a picture of him.

I was trying to get up the guts to make a call. And there was a question that I wanted to ask him.

Now, what kind of question do you think I wanted to ask? Who's there with you in the studio?

[9 : 04] Have you brushed your teeth this morning? What's the name of your cat? No. Surely I was going to ask a question that would make the most of the one chance that I had to talk to him.

Right? And we don't know what questions Herod had for Jesus. But whatever they were, today wasn't the day for it. Jesus gave him no answer.

Why? Was Jesus just being unkind? No. Jesus knew why he was there. And it wasn't to show off for this puppet king.

He knew what he needed to do. And giving no answer was all part of it. Speaking of being unkind, what did Herod do when he didn't get the answers he wanted?

Verse 11. Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. What a king!

[10 : 04] Imagine if I or anyone didn't get the answer we wanted when we called Weird Al. Just start abusing. Your parodies are rubbish. You haven't had a good song since the 90s. Imagine that.

You can't imagine it, can you? It's unimaginable. But this is how a king treats an innocent man, and then they send him back to Pilate.

Before we go on, I think it's worth pausing to ask, what is Luke doing in these interactions with these guys, with Pilate and Herod?

It's subtle, but it's there, I think. Neither of them think he's guilty, but also neither of them treat him with much respect.

Nothing like what he deserves. Most of all, they don't treat him as king. It would be easy to find contrast, wouldn't it, between Herod and Pilate.

[11 : 06] One seems sort of on side, the other not so, but both still rejected. How? Just think of how people respond to Jesus.

In your mind, you might think of the outright hostile or the ambivalent or apathetic. However, there are a good number of people who respond with interest, with intrigue.

They like to listen, don't they? They like to discover. I know a non-Christian teenager who likes to read the Bible because he's interested. When I asked him if we could read it together, he said, don't think I'm going to become a Christian or something.

Sometimes we hear how keen to listen to John the Baptist, Herod was.

Maybe someone likes listening to sermons or visiting church. Or maybe someone just loves hearing about God. Herod's interest was put to the test, wasn't it?

[12 : 21] Twice. Once when he beheaded John the Baptist, and this time. And so was Pilate's.

They both had God's Messiah before them. Did they believe? Did they worship? God will sometimes put our loves to the test.

Our response to the Messiah to the test. Well, after Jesus got his dressing down from Herod, the Jewish leaders took him back to Pilate for the final hilarious display of justice.

Once more looking for grounds for a sentence. Let's look from 13. Pilate called together the chief priests, rulers and the people and said to them, you brought me this man as one who is inciting the people to rebellion.

I have examined him in your presence and found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. As you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death.

[13 : 34] If there was an examination, other than what we saw before, we don't hear about it. A Pilate hands down his judgment, and it's damning, isn't it?

But not for Jesus, for the Jewish leaders. Not only is there no basis for a charge again, he includes Herod for extra weight. Neither of us have any reason for a charge.

So I guess that's it. Game over. They try their best. You thought you knew judgment's been passed. Everybody goes home. That's not it, is it?

If only that's how this court worked. No, the crowd aren't happy, are they? They cry out their displeasure. Verse 18.

Away with this man! Release Barabbas! Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city and for murder.

[14 : 38] No! We don't like this ruling! The innocent man has to go. Instead, they're thinking, you should release, um, who?

Oh, I know, Barabbas! Yes! Barabbas! So Luke jumps in and writes, um, to let the reader know who they're talking about. Oh, that's the guy who's in prison for insurrection and murder.

Barabbas! When I was a kid, and I read this passage, and it said insurrection, I was like, what even is insurrection? But we all know now what insurrection is, don't we?

You write insurrection into Google and click images, and you see a familiar sight. Right? It's a terrible thing, but you see something that we all know that, it's insurrection.

Okay? This is what Barabbas did. I don't know what city he did in, maybe Jerusalem, but that is insurrection. And as far as insurrectionists, you've probably seen this phrase before, that is an insurrectionist, and that guy is in prison for insurrection.

[15 : 54] Right? You guys know this, right? You've seen the internet. Can you imagine how much more violent insurrection might have been in Barabbas' day?

On top of insurrection, he was a murderer too, and the crowd shout, Release Barabbas! Away with Jesus! What? Now, you think a sensible governor would say, Oh, hey, come on, calm down anyone but him.

Anyone! No, he doesn't do it. He turns his attention to Jesus. I guess that's something. Verse 20, Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again, but they kept shouting, Crucify him, crucify him.

Pilate doesn't want to hand Jesus over. He appeals to them again, but the crowd won't have it. In fact, they've intensified their response, haven't they? Crucify! And so one more time, Pilate appeals and asks, Why?

Verse 22, For the third time he spoke to them, Why? What crime has this man committed? I find in him no grounds for the death penalty.

[17:10] Therefore, I will punish him and then release him. But with loud shouts, they insistently demanded that he be crucified. It's like Pilate is pulling his hair out, isn't it?

His judgment is almost worthless with this crowd. They don't seem to care about his authority. They're just going to press and press until they get what they want. And that's exactly what happens.

In verse 23, Their shouts prevailed. And Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

It's like the world had been turned on its head. The judge responds to the will of the people. Both governor and king find no guilt, just an innocent man, an innocent man. What difference does that make? No difference. The crowd get what they knew to be true all along.

[18:23] This so-called Messiah to them, who's taken their authority and status among the people, sentenced to death. A murderer, who's got nothing to do with it, bystander basically, a man they know is guilty, goes free instead.

Upside down, isn't it? It makes no sense. So where are we in all of this?

How do we apply this crazy trial to our lives? In the previous few passages, we've been watching Jesus and his followers reflecting on various challenges, trials of different kinds, temptations, challenges, sifting.

In today's passage, we see some pretty wild actions in regard to Jesus, don't we? Accusations, mockery, beatings, weak leadership. And so you might wonder, is Luke challenging us to consider our response to the true king, like the Jewish leaders, or Pilate and Herod, and their hand in his death.

But despite that possible application, I don't think that's simply where Luke wants us to land. We've seen the failure of Peter and the disciples, and felt the tension of standing in their shoes.

[20:05] And so in light of that, considering how we've seen the innocent Jesus face the death of a criminal, and still wrestling with our own ups and downs, and feeling with, I'm not worthy, God doesn't love me, is God angry, will God continue to accept and forgive me?

We're not to find ourselves in the shoes of the Jewish leaders, Pilate, Herod, even the soldiers, but of Barabbas, the one guilty of insurrection and murder.

That isn't an accusation of murder, but an assumption of guilt. Guilty of sin.

When innocent Jesus was sentenced to death, the guilty, that is you and me, and every sinner, that is everyone who broke friendship with God, is set free.

when Barabbas, that is everyone, but yeah, sorry, sorry, I read that wrong.

[21:24] We are Barabbas. We are Barabbas, but better. Barabbas is free from prison. No penalty, no punishment, no bars, no guilt, no worry.

Completely free. Anyone that Jesus died in the place of, like Barabbas, also has no punishment, no penalty, no bars, no guilt, no worry.

Completely free. And this is great news for all people, especially for those who want to become like Barabbas. For those who say to God, I want Jesus' death and punishment to be for me.

Then their friendship with God will be restored and nothing will ever break it. But some of you may still feel worry.

Some of you may still feel guilt. Before I said sometimes we can feel unworthy or worry that God is angry or doesn't love us. But what is so wonderful about being in the shoes of Barabbas is that once that gavel came down and that judgment was made, the anger or wrath of God for your sin or failure or mistakes, in whatever heart you did it, the penalty is paid.

[22:51] There is no punishment. Just listen again to the way Isaiah puts it that was read before. It's on the screen. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering.

Yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities.

The punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed. In other words, like Jesus said on the cross, it is finished.

Yes, it might feel sometimes like God is distant. You might worry sometimes because of things you've done, things you've felt, that God is angry.

But that is wrong. That is so wrong. You never have to feel that way if you have put your trust in Jesus.

[24 : 01] You are friends with God because of what Jesus has done, because of what Jesus has completed, because of what Jesus has finished. There is no guilt.

There is no need for worry. There is no distance regardless of feeling. And so whenever you find yourself worrying because of sin, thinking that God thinks less of you or that you can't break the cycle, you think, I've become one of those bad Christians.

Not like those holy people at church. They're much more godly than me. much closer to God as if that were a thing.

I want you to remind yourself of these words. They're not from the Bible. They're from a song.

They're great. On the screen. And I can't forget the death of that man.

It set Barabbas free and that's who I am. They come from a great song written by a Christian Aussie singer-songwriter called Nathan Tasker and I want to finish by reading you a verse and chorus that I always find encouraging.

[25 : 22] It's called Call Me Barabbas. Crucify him, they shouted so loud. The angry death wish from the rabble crowd, we want Barabbas set free.

The choice had been made, the hands had been washed, the death of one man is all his freedom cost. But I can't help thinking Barabbas is me and Jesus set me free.

So call me Barabbas because that's who I am. All I deserve has been given to him. The guilty set free, the innocent must die.

A lifetime of sin is all that I know. I should have been killed but Jesus let me go. And I can't forget the death of that man.

It set free Barabbas and that's who I am. Let me pray. Gracious Father, thanks so much for the death of our Lord Jesus who though he was innocent died in the place of the guilty.

[26 : 36] Us who sinned against you so our relationship with you could be restored. Please help us to stand in the shoes of Barabbas to take hold of the freedom that Jesus gives in his death so we might live his life.

Amen.