

27:1 *When the morning was come*- Trying a man through the night was hardly transparent or in accordance with the most basic standards of integrity. And yet on some issues, at this very same time, those men sought to carefully uphold their integrity and obedience to Divine principles. In this we see the tragic, cruel dualism of the human mind- and we understand again the call of God's word to give ourselves to Him with our *whole* heart.

*Took counsel*- We sense their nervousness and conscious desire to try to spread the responsibility for their decision as wide as possible. We can imagine the learned, pseudo-spiritual shaking of heads amongst those men, arguing that they had, sadly, no option but... struggling, somewhere, with their own consciences, and desperately seeking support from others.

27:2 *When they had bound Him*- Israelites binding a man and delivering him over to Gentiles sounds very much like what Israel did to Samson. The Lord must've reflected how easily He likewise could have burst those bands and destroyed them all. The similarity with Samson is surely to remind us that He had those possibilities, but He was consciously choosing to give His life. The great paradox was that by accepting those bonds, He was thereby binding the strong man of sin and sin as manifested in the Jewish system (12:29).

*Led Him away*- See on 26:57 *Led Him away*.

*The Governor*- The Lord knew that He was the Messianic "Governor" (2:6 s.w.), just as He was in fact the judge rather than the accused. He had only the previous evening pointed out that He was "the chief", the same word used for "Governor", but chose to be the servant (Lk. 22:26). The whole scenario was a total inversion of what was actually the case.

27:3 *Which had betrayed Him*- "Betrayed" is the same Greek word as translated "delivered" in :2. Judas handed Him over to the Jews, and the Jews handed Him over to the Romans. We see here a reflection of the unity between Judas and the Jewish system, which is why both of these entities are called 'satan' or 'the devil'. Satan entered into Judas in the sense that he was taken over by the spirit of Judaism, the world system around him, just as we can be. The Lord foresaw all this; He realized that He must die by crucifixion, and therefore since the Jews didn't have the power to do it, He knew they would have to hand Him over to the Romans. There were elements of His sufferings which were clearly revealed to Him by the Father, but many of His predictions are also explicable in terms of His sensitivity and intense perception of the nature of human behaviour.

*Saw that he was condemned-* Perhaps the emphasis should be upon the "he". I speculated earlier that part of the deal with Judas was that he was to be the key witness for the prosecution at the Sanhedrin trial. He surely would have been present, and seen Jesus condemned. But he perceived that actually Jesus was the judge, and it was he that was condemned by the Lord's condemnation at the hands of men. He was in the same position as Peter, who also at that same time realized that he was condemned, weeping the bitter tears of the rejected. But Judas simply didn't trust the Lord's grace.

*Repented-* Literally, 'to care again / afterwards'. A different word is used for repentance in a moral sense. This word suggests that Judas was selfish to the last, and realized the best way to care for himself was to commit suicide. Faced with our sin, we have the option of responding either as Peter, in sincerity and vowing our loyalty again to our Lord, or as Judas did- caring for ourselves, trying to make the most of a bad situation, taking what we perceive to be the lesser of various evils which now face us. This latter option does of course involve an element of re-thinking, but that is not of itself repentance in the Biblical sense. As with all facets of spirituality, there is the true repentance and the false one, just as there is true peace and false peace, sincere love and feigned love, faith unfeigned and faith which is merely hoping for the best, prayer from the heart and prayer as a form of words. The Jews left in the land just after the Babylonian invasion had a sense of guilt, a knowledge that they were sinners and were suffering for their sin; but they had to be exhorted to truly *repent*: "This is what you are saying: 'Our offences and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?'. Say to them... I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ez. 33:10,11 NIV). Like so many a prisoner, so many a Christian, like Judas and Achan, like you and me, they had the sense of desire to come back to God, the detailed realization of wherein they had failed; but not enough real strength of purpose to seriously repent.

*Brought again-* The same word used for how the Lord bade Peter put again his sword into the sheath (26:52). Again the similarity between the positions of the two men is being developed. The concern of Judas for the money surely reflects how financial motives had played a large part in his decision to betray the Lord. "What will you give me, and I will betray Him unto you?" makes clear that he was obsessed with money. The record here emphasizes his attitude to the money- he brought it again to the Jews and then cast it down on the floor. Clearly he felt that the money had been a large part in his motivation. And again we should be aghast at what men will do for money, how strong is our love of it, our desire for it... and this led Judas to commit the greatest sin ever committed in the cosmos.

27:4 *Saying-* As if he was speaking, admitting that "I have sinned", whilst holding the silver

pieces in his hand. Again the impression is given that quite simply he did what he did from the love of money.

*I have sinned-* The very words of the repentant prodigal son, Job, Micah and David (Lk. 15:18,21; 2 Sam. 12:13; 24:10; Job 7:20; Mic. 7:9). But instead of going back to the Father, Judas went and killed himself. Again we see that recognition of sin and regret for it are one thing, but this is not at all the same as repentance and conversion. Peter, who was in the same position as Judas, truly repented and converted. Instead of going to his own death, Peter went to the cross to see the death of God's Son, and perceived in that the possibility of his own forgiveness. "I have sinned" were likewise the words of Pharaoh (Ex. 9:27; 10:16), Balaam (Num. 22:34), Achan (Josh. 7:20) and several times of Saul (1 Sam. 15:24,30; 26:21). But although these men all said the same words as the prodigal son, Job, Micah and David- they all perished in condemnation. Recognition of sin, therefore, is not the same as true repentance. To admit that we are, of course, sinners... is not the same as repentance and conversion. And so it was with Judas.

*I have betrayed the innocent blood-* Judas at his final end recognized that Jesus was sinless; and he refers to Jesus not by His name, but as "the innocent blood". He had a good theoretical grasp of the principles of the atonement and the nature of Jesus. But that didn't help him. He recognized the ultimate innocence of Jesus. Correct knowledge concerning Jesus and recognition of personal sin is not enough to save us. There has to be the faith in grace which Peter had, and because Judas lacked this, he remained condemned. This highlights the fact that appreciation of grace is not just a cosmetic issue, but is fundamental to the Gospel and our personal salvation. The Greek word for "innocent" means literally 'not guilty'; Judas recognized that the Lord's trial at the hands of the Jews had been nothing but farcical, and the innocent had been condemned as guilty.

*What is that to us?-* Maybe their idea was that Judas had given his testimony in court and it could not now be retracted. Again we note their strict legalism on one hand, whilst behaving in the most unconscionable way on the other.

*27:5 Cast down-* The Greek *rhipto* literally means to disperse and is used in classical Greek for depositing money; it may be a technical term for a donation to the poor, or some sort of charitable donation. Perhaps this was his final repentance for stealing what had been intended as donations for the poor. This would explain why he didn't give the money back to the priests and

elders, but rather took it to the temple and cast it / dispersed / donated it there; hence they decided that it could not remain in “the treasury” (:6). He now gave it back, even though he had no personal hope of salvation because he didn't trust the Lord's grace.

*The temple-* Judas presumably had been at the High Priest's palace for the trial, and it was a fair walk from there to the temple. His visit to the priests and elders may have been at the High Priest's palace, not at the temple. So he went to the temple purposefully, to throw his money down in the temple, perhaps throwing it into the ‘trumpets’ into which people poured their money, and where the Lord had commented upon the widow throwing in her two last pennies. It would seem, therefore, that he did repent of his materialism, in the sense that he realized he had done wrong and wished to give those thirty pieces of silver at least to God's house and work. And yet he did not ultimately repent. See on :4 *I have sinned*. It is one thing to recognize our sin of materialism and to even give the wealth to the Lord's cause, but true repentance is another matter. It is a state of heart, and is modelled in Peter as opposed to Judas. It seems Judas did externally what was appropriate for someone who ‘repented’; he returned the money to God, but this is still not enough. All that ‘putting things right’ was rather irrelevant compared to the need for faith in the Lord's grace and forgiveness.

*Departed-* Adam attempted to hide from God's presence, the Hebrew implying 'to draw oneself back'. Judas went away (Gk. he retired away), from the house of God, the temple, to try to hang himself, once he knew his condemnation (Mt. 27:5). He went to the Potter's field (Acts 1:18), which was in the Valley of Hinnom. He went to Gehenna, the place of condemnation, of his own accord. His own legs carried him there. Ps. 112:10 has echoes of the scenario: "The wicked shall see it (the Kingdom) and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth (judgment day language), and melt away". In similar vein the apostle speaks of the rejected as those who even now "*draw back* unto perdition" (Heb. 10:39). The implication is that by our attitude now, we effectively judge ourselves; if we draw back from Christ in this life, we will slink away from him in the day of judgment. The types of judgment also stress this slinking away. As there will be a slinking away at the final judgment, so there was at the cross, which was "the judgment of this world". Early on in the crucifixion, the people hurled confident insults at Him. But we get the impression that this died out over the hours; until "*all* the people that came together to that sight... smote their breasts, and returned" (Lk. 23:48). They slipped away, one by one, as those who brought the adulterous woman to the Lord (this was another type of the judgment; they slipped away from Him, self-condemned- (Jn. 8:9). All this was a foretaste of how there will be an ashamed slinking away from the judgment seat by the rejected, being "ashamed from before him at His coming", the Greek suggesting the idea of slinking away in shame (1 Jn. 2:28 Gk.). The wicked will melt away from the Lord's presence (Ps. 68:2). Rejected Israel are described as being "ashamed away" (Joel 1:12)- the same idea. This is the idea behind Heb. 12:15 RVmg: "...man that falls back

from the grace of God". What they did in this life in slinking away from the reality of pure grace will be what is worked out in their condemnation experience. There seems a certain similarity between this and how the combined Gospel records imply that men initially mocked Jesus on the cross, and then eventually slipped away in silence (Heb. 6:6).

*27:6 Took the silver pieces-* See on :5 *Cast down*. I suggested there that Judas actually put the silver pieces into the trumpet-like collection bowls, and thereby into the temple treasury. But the priests literally had to fish them out of there because of their legalistic obsession with not having blood money in the temple treasury. Even though they had likely taken that money out of the treasury themselves in the first place. Their self-contradictory legalism is a great theme of the record here.

*Not lawful to put them-* "Put" here translates *ballo*, to throw. Although it is a different word to that used about Judas 'casting' the silver pieces in the temple [I suggested, into the collection containers], the idea is similar. They were now trying to find fault with Judas- and were claiming that he had acted incorrectly by 'casting' blood money into the temple treasury. Their idea that it was not lawful was based around their extension of the commandment of Dt. 25:18 "You must not bring the hire of a prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of Yahweh your God". But there was not actually any direct Divine law which forbade those pieces of silver going into the temple treasury. Their extension of the *implication* of a Divine law had become, in their minds, itself a law which they had to obey. This is the problem with legalistic attitudes- more laws are spawned. Their concerns about what was lawful and "not lawful" run throughout the Gospel records (12:2,10; 19:3; 22:17 etc.). The Law of Moses was intended for the time and place it was given, and was part of an ongoing dialogue between God and His people; and the legal code given by Moses in places contradicts itself, or allows various options for obedience or various outcomes for disobedience [e.g. adultery]. It wasn't intended to be used in a casuistic sense, and parts of it were overridden or abrogated even before the Lord Jesus came. If it is used in a casuistic, black and white sense, then like any law, it logically spawns hosts of other requirements. What 'logically follows' becomes the deciding issue, rather than the spirit of loving God and doing what He wishes.

*27:7 They took counsel-* As in :1. They were eager to spread responsibility for their actions in the entire business of killing the Lord; human beings feel safer beneath the umbrella of a committee, a group. And yet those men, like us, will each have to meet the Lord personally and face the consequence of their actions.

*Bought with them the potter's field-* Acts 1:18 says that Judas “obtained it with the reward of his iniquity” (RV). And yet the thirty pieces of silver were still in his hand right up to the end of his life. Purchase of property was a slow business in Palestine, and nobody would have been doing business over the Passover feast. Neither is there any time in the narrative for Judas to have bought or obtained the field. And yet Acts 1:18 states that Judas “obtained” the field with the silver pieces, the reward of his iniquity, and killed himself there. I suggest the reconciliation is that the Jews bought the place where Judas had committed suicide *in Judas' name*, even though he was dead. This again would've involved a fair amount of fiddling books and behaviour of low integrity. And yet it was ostensibly done in strict and careful obedience to the idea that money earned by dishonest means should not be brought into the temple; this was based on Dt. 25:18 “You must not bring the hire of a prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of Yahweh your God”. Again and again we see how these men who committed the worst possible sin in the entire universe... were strictly legally obedient to some Divine laws and the principles arising from them. This is a powerful warning to all of us religious people; we can so easily serve God with only part of our mind, one half of our brain. And the results are disastrous. Nothing less than the entire heart and soul and mind must be given over to Him.

The Potter's field was in the Valley of Hinnom, Gehenna; Judas went to Gehenna to kill himself, the ultimate proof that all who shall finally be condemned will in essence have condemned themselves.

*To bury strangers in-* Thus through the death of Christ it became possible that Gentiles could have a place within Jerusalem, the city of God.

*27:8 Was called The Field of Blood-* This was surely not what the Jewish leadership wished it to be called. Time and again we see that their careful plans didn't work out. Likewise they bribed the soldiers guarding the tomb to say that the Lord's body had been stolen- and the news of their bribery became widespread.

*Unto this day-* Suggesting an early date to the Gospels.

*27:9 By Jeremiah-* The quotation is from Zechariah (Zech. 11:12). The standard explanations are that the volume of the prophets in which Zechariah was included began with Jeremiah and was therefore referred to as "Jeremiah"; or that in fact Jeremiah wrote Zechariah 9-11 and this was included in the prophecy now known as Zechariah. For more on this, see on :10 *The potter's field*. Given the very detailed congruence between reality and the Gospel records, it would be unlikely that such an obvious error was made. We who believe in an inspired Bible should rather,

in any case, say with humility "I am still searching for more light on this question" rather than assume that here we have an evidence of a fallible Bible. If one part is inaccurate, what about the rest... The context of Zech. 11:12,13 is significant- note the pronouns in the Hebrew text, in that the money was cast to the potter by the same prophet who had been valued at the low price of 30 pieces of silver: "If it seem good to you, give me my wages; but if not, let it alone: and they weighed me as wages thirty silverlings. Then Jehovah said to me, Throw it to the potter, the splendid price at which I am valued by them; and so I took the thirty silverlings, and threw it into the house of Jehovah to the potter". Throwing it to the potter was a response of sarcasm [as was the reference to "the splendid price"], in that this was the price of a dead slave (Ex. 21:32), and far below what a prophet should have been valued at, let alone the Son of God. Just as Judas threw the coins into the temple treasury, so the Jews threw them to the potter. Judas and the Jewish leadership are thereby once again connected, they were part of the same 'satan' system which was the adversary to the Lord. Those learned Jews, steeped as they were in the text of Scripture, surely closed their minds to these words as they so clearly fulfilled them. We too can know Scripture, and yet the flesh has a way of hiving off the part of our minds that is aware of them. And according to the prophecy, it was the undervalued prophet himself who threw the coins to the potter. The action of the Jewish elders was therefore directly controlled by the risen Lord. This connection between the prophet (Jesus) and the Jews is surely reflected by the way in which the Hebrew text speaks of the prophet himself throwing the coins to the potter, whereas that is quoted here in Matthew as if they, the children of Israel, cast them to the potter. See on :10 *As the Lord appointed Me*. If they had thought upon Zechariah 11 with open minds, they would have seen in their own actions the very evidence that He was alive and working through them to their own condemnation. And the context of Zech. 11:12,13 is God's breaking of His covenant with Israel because of their undervaluing of His prophet. This is precisely what happened in that the new covenant was confirmed to the extent that the old covenant was abrogated.

*The price of Him that was valued-* The implication is that the Lord's price was 30 pieces of silver. This is strong evidence against the suggestion often made that the 30 pieces were a down-payment made to Judas. That suggestion is perhaps so frequently offered because 30 pieces of silver seems such a low price. But Judas had asked: "What will you give me, and I will betray Him unto you?", and the price agreed was 30 pieces of silver. But we need not be so surprised. Because surely we have all seen people make the most unwise and sinful decisions for the sake of money, even relatively small amounts of it. And the more I reflect upon these records, the more convinced I am that the crime of the cosmos, of all time in eternity, the worst action at any point of infinite time and space, was committed for love of money. And so pathetically little of it. It truly is the root of all evil. And such a pathetically small amount, the compensation price of a dead slave, that could only buy a piece of ground in the despised valley of Hinnom, the Potter's field, muddy and useless for building, from which much of the clay had already been dug out by the potters, surrounded by the smell of burning bodies and garbage that remained constantly in

the valley of Hinnom. In these reflections is surely the most powerful warning which there could be against petty materialism. Peter had surely reflected upon all this when he wrote of "the precious blood of Christ... unto you therefore who believe He is precious" (1 Pet. 1:19; 2:7), using the same word translated here as "valued". Indeed, that family of Greek words is used around 12 times by Peter in his letters; the tragedy of how the Lord was not "valued" by Judas and Israel was a tragedy to Peter, and he wanted the church to compensate for it. *We* are to value Him and His blood, far more than Judas and the Jews did.

*The children of Israel-* Jesus was "Him... whom they priced on the part of the sons of Israel" (Mt. 27:9 RVmg.). The reference to "the sons of Israel" is surely an allusion to the sons of Jacob selling Joseph for his value.

27:10 *The potter's field-* We cannot miss the fact that the potter is a clear Old Testament symbol for God (Is. 41:25; 64:8; Jer. 18:6; 19:11; Rom. 9:21). And "the field is the world" (Mt. 13:38). The price of the Lord's blood bought the potter's field, God's field, the world, as a resting place for faithful Gentiles who had come on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and died there. We noted on :9 *By Jeremiah* that Zech. 11:12,13 was likely written by Jeremiah. And that now makes sense. Because it was at "the potter's house" that Jeremiah had uttered his prophecies, stating that God was the potter, He was manifest in that potter to whose field Jeremiah had 'gone down' (Jer. 18:2; 'going down' implies it was in a valley, as was the Potter's Field bought by the Jews). The money being cast to the potter therefore suggests that ultimately, all returns to God. No silver pieces are ours for ever, as they were not the Jews' nor Judas's. It was ultimately thrown to the potter in the Potter's Field, the very place where Jeremiah had prophesied and explained that that potter was in fact representative of God.

*As the Lord appointed Me-* See on :9 *By Jeremiah*. The throwing of the coins to the potter by "the children of Israel" was in fact done by the undervalued prophet, the Lord Jesus. Their purchase of the field was surely done after Passover had finished- after the Lord's resurrection. And actually He was controlling what they did. If they had compared their actions against Zechariah 11, a passage they knew well, then they would have perceived this.

27:11 *The Governor-* This is Matthew's preferred term for Pilate. Perhaps he doesn't name Pilate because he wants to draw out the similarity between how the Lord stood before a governor, and how those in Christ (especially in the last days) will likewise be brought before "governors" (10:18; Mk. 13:19; Lk. 21:12 "You shall be brought before governors"). This is yet another example of how the faithful in the very final days of the tribulation will share in the spirit of Christ's passion; even if they do not literally die, they will be led by the tribulation experience to



identify with the spirit of the suffering Christ, so that they can legitimately share in the spirit of His resurrection life.

*The King of the Jews*- Out of the various Jewish accusations against the Lord, this was the only one which directly affected the Romans, and was the technical reason for Pilate agreeing to the death penalty; it was this reason which was written over the Lord's head on the cross. The irony of the situation must have rubbed hard upon the Lord; He was dying as the King of a people, not one of whom would openly show loyalty to Him. In any suffering we may have because of feeling utterly alone, betrayed, having lived life to no end, not being shown loyalty by those we expect it of- we are connected with the spirit of the cross.

*You say it*- Jesus before Pilate said just one word in Greek; translated "You say it". It is stressed there that Jesus said nothing else, so that Pilate marvelled at His silent self-control. Yet Paul speaks with pride of how the Lord Jesus "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (1 Tim. 6:13). You'd expect him to be alluding to some major speech of Jesus. But it seems, reading his spirit, Paul's saying: 'Lord Jesus, your self control, your strength of purpose, was great. I salute you, I hold you up to Timothy as the supreme example. Just one word. What a witness!'. As He witnessed in His ministry, so must we (Rom. 2:19 cp. Mt. 4:16). As He witnessed before Pilate, so must we witness (1 Tim. 6:12,13).

27:12 *Accused of the chief priests*- The accusations were of course false (as Pilate himself pointed out, Lk. 23:14), making the chief priests and Jewish system the 'devil', the false accuser. In my *The Real Devil* I demonstrated at length that the terms 'satan' and 'devil' often refer specifically to the Jewish system in the first century. The paradox was that it was those very Jews who were standing in the dock before God, accused by the writings of Moses (Jn. 5:45). And yet we must give Jn. 12:42 its due weight- many of the chief rulers believed in Jesus as Christ but were fearful of the Pharisees and exclusion from the synagogue. So it has so often been- fear of religious excommunication leads believers to crucify their Christ brethren. Their behaviour is explained by the repeated descriptions of the Jews 'gathering together' to take their decisions about killing the Lord. In company, men adopt positions far beyond those they personally hold, and even strongly against their own personal convictions. Reading the account of Jewish treatment of Jesus, it seems incredible, at first blush, that some or even "many" of those men "believed in Him". But this is the power of group think and the fear of appearing strange to others, or being rejected by others, especially from their religious fellowship.

*Answered nothing*- Perhaps for the same reason that He remained silent during the Jewish trial (see notes on 26:63). His only answer would be to speak judgment against them, and He wished to delay this until the last possible moment, in order to give them the chance for repentance. So many times in the Gospel records, in Matthew especially, we read that during His ministry the

Lord "answered and said...". The same Greek word is used. He had given His answer to their accusations and positions throughout His ministry, and now the time for providing fresh evidence was over. They knew His answers.

27:13 *Do you not hear*- The implication was 'Are you deaf?'. The Lord was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies that Messiah would be as deaf before His accusers (Ps. 38:13 "I as a deaf man don't hear"; Is. 42:19 "Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as he who is at peace, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?"). The quotation from Psalm 38 is from one of the Psalms David wrote concerning his failure with Bathsheba and subsequent sufferings. Many other of these Psalms, especially Psalms 22 and 69, are full of material relevant to the Lord's sufferings. We observe therefore that through suffering for his sin, David came to know the sufferings of his future Messiah. We marvel at how God works through sin. He doesn't ignore it, nor simply punish men for the sake of needing to punish them. Those sufferings and the very experience of sin are somehow worked through by God in order to bring men to His Son and to His cross. We likewise should not turn away from sinners but rather seek to work with them to bring them to know Christ, knowing that this is indeed God's game plan with them too. The allusion to Is. 42:19 must be understood likewise in the context of that passage. The preceding verse has appealed to the blind and deaf within Judah at that time: "Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind" (Is. 42:18), and then goes on say that sinless Messiah likewise was deaf and blind. We see here a principle that was to be worked out throughout the Lord's passion- He identified with sinners. They were deaf and blind, and He now acted as deaf and blind, He identified with sinners to the point that He felt as a sinner. His silence to the accusations was therefore also capable of being understood as the silence of a guilty man before His accusers. Not that the Lord was guilty, but He identified with sinful man to the extent that He felt that way, and this all came to its final term in His genuine feeling that He had been forsaken even by God (:46). Not that He was, for God only forsakes sinners and never forsakes the righteous (see notes on :46). But He so identified with sinners that the Lord felt as one of us, although He was not a sinner. Yet as the Lord stood before His accusers silent, He knew great peace; so Is. 42:19 assures us: "Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as *he who is at peace*, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?".

*They testify against you*- The Greek is used only four times in the New Testament; twice at this point (in Mk. 15:4 also) and twice in the comment of the High Priest at the Lord's earlier trial (Mt. 26:62; Mk. 14:60). Circumstances repeated. The Lord learnt silence at the first trial, and there was the same reaction from the judge; and now the situation repeated itself, although Pilate had not been present at the first trial. He overcame that first test, and repeated the victory. We have seen how in contrast to this, Peter was given various tests which he failed the first time and then subsequent times when they were repeated (e.g. the three failures to keep awake in Gethsemane, and the triple failure to not deny the Lord later that evening).

27:14 *Astonished*- This is the same response by the judge as at the Lord's earlier trial (26:62,63; see on 27:13 *They testify against you*). Pilate had presided over many such cases of men being falsely accused. He was astounded at how a man in the face of such blatantly false accusation could be so self-controlled. This, in spiritual terms, was our Lord at one of His most supreme moments. He sets a supreme example to all those falsely accused. Pilate was also staggered at

how the Lord had a good human chance of getting off the hook by answering what was blatantly false. But the Lord's mission was to give His life- it was not taken from Him, He gave it. And therefore He made no attempt to get Himself off.

*27:15 To release-* The Greek is also translated 'to forgive', and there was within the 'release' the idea that the crime had been forgiven. This was not, therefore, completely appropriate for the Lord Jesus, who had done no wrong. The same word is used in Acts 2:24 of how God "loosed" Jesus from the pangs of death. The Lord's temptation would have been to hope against hope that each of the human possibilities of release would come true. But He had resolutely decided to do God's will unto the end, and therefore He knew that the only ultimate release would be in resurrection, and that would be performed by the Father rather than by any human power. The language of loosing or releasing [s.w.] is used about what the Lord achieved by His death (He 'loosed' the works of the devil, 1 Jn. 3:8; loosed the middle wall of partition, Eph. 2:14; loosed the seals on the book of life, Rev. 5:5). As ever, the paradox was that this release, this form of salvation, falsely appeared to be in the power of those who crucified the Lord. But the Lord saw through it all. Likewise, they appeared His judges and He appeared the guilty; when the opposite was the case.

*Whom they wanted-* In essence, they had made their choice earlier. The Lord had used the same word in 12:7: "But if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not [s.w. "wanted"] have condemned the guiltless". The Lord perceived that the essence of the cross, the essence of all that was happening to Him, had already happened during His ministry. They had already condemned the guiltless. This would have helped Him not to hang too intensely on the possibility of the outcome of events changing suddenly at the last minute through some failure in their legal process. And we perceive too that there was no great divide between His final intense sufferings, and what He went through during His life. Our carrying of the cross likewise is a daily matter, rather than a few moments of intense choice which occur during our lives. The same Greek word translated "wanted" occurs three times in describing how they 'wanted' to condemn Jesus and 'wanted' Barabbas (:15,17,21). Lk. 23:25 concludes the section by saying that Pilate "delivered Jesus to their will". It is the same word which the Lord had agonized over in Gethsemane- "Not as I *will*, but as You *will*" (26:39). Even though it appeared that the will of evil, conniving men was being done, it was in fact the Father's will. And we can take similar comfort when it appears that the will of evil men is being done. Ultimately, there is the Father's will far over and above them, working on a far higher level, although we cannot see the final picture of His purpose in specific moments. It can be painful of itself to pray the Father's will be done (6:10), but this is what it meant for the Lord. It took Him an hour [long enough for the disciples to fall asleep] to pray for the Father's will to be done, and not His (26:42). In the Lord's ministry, He had sought to do not His own will but the Father's (Jn. 5:30; 6:38), and this came to its ultimate moment in His situation in Gethsemane facing the cross. Again we see that the essence of Gethsemane and of the Lord's choice to die on the cross was not simply in these final intense moments, but was an outflow of a life daily lived by that principle, in which to do the Father's will was the food He ate and the air He breathed (Jn. 4:34). John doesn't record the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane concerning doing the Father's will rather than His own will, but [as so often] John has made the same point in other ways earlier in his Gospel; John has shown the Lord making this choice throughout His life, and inviting His followers to do

likewise (Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). This is John's way of showing that the essence of Gethsemane and the cross was to be found throughout the Lord's life.

27:16 *Notable-* The Greek *epi-semos* literally means 'one of sign'; we are thereby invited to see the name 'Barabbas' as signifying something. Before the Jews were two men claiming to be sons of Abba, and they chose the false one. The Lord's claim to be Son of God was the reason why the Jews particularly wanted to kill Him.

*Barabbas-* Son of Abba, the father. This man was clearly an anti-Christ, a fake Christ, a man set up in appearance as the Christ, the son of God, when he was the very opposite. And Israel chose him. His similarity with the Lord is made even more interesting by the fact that some early manuscripts (such as the Caesarean, the Sinaitic Palimpsest and the Palestinian Syriac) here read 'Jesus Barabbas' (1). The four gospel records only occasionally all record the same incident. When they do all mention the same thing, it seems that the Spirit intends us to see an especial significance in this. The fact that the crowd chose Barabbas rather than the Lord of glory is one of those aspects of the Passion which is recorded by all four writers. There is much information given about Barabbas, emphasizing the kind of criminal he was (Mt. 27:16; Mk. 15:7; Lk. 23:19; Jn. 18:40). That men would reject the righteousness of God, the Spotless Lamb of God, for such a man... this is the tragic story of our race and our nature. And it was the ecclesia of those days which made this dastard choice, and crucified the Lord Jesus. The same nature, the same blindness, is in us all.

27:17 *Gathered together-* See on 26:57. The way the Jews were "gathered together" at this time, literally 'synagogued', is significant in that we see how the Lord's passion gathered men together, either for or against Him. And it is the same today.

*Release unto you-* This word is used of how Paul could have been released or "let go" because after examination by the Romans, "there was no cause of death in me" (Acts 28:18). Paul's trials are full of connection with those of the Lord, and Paul (like us) took special comfort in any similarity between the Lord's sufferings and his own. For this is indeed why we have such a mass of detail about the Lord's final sufferings- we are to see endless points of connection between His experiences and our own. And as Paul says, if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It was to this process which we signed up to at baptism, in which we dedicated ourselves to a life of dying and living with Him.

*Jesus which is called Christ-* Not 'who claims to be Christ' or 'is called by some 'the Christ''. Pilate is reminding them Jesus was the Christ, and they had stated that they thought this was a capital offence. Pilate was offering them the choice between Barabbas and Jesus exactly because he knew they would choose Barabbas. He had a conscience about the matter of this Jesus of Nazareth, and he wanted the choice to crucify Him to be theirs and not his. He cleverly reasoned

that he had pronounced Jesus innocent, but the choice to kill him would effectively have been the choice of the Jews if they chose Barabbas over Jesus. This is all the sense of the following explanatory comment "For he knew that they had delivered him up out of envy".

*27:18 For he knew that they had delivered Him up out of envy-* See on :17 *Jesus which is called Christ*. Pilate was encouraging them to choose Barabbas over Jesus so that the guilt of Jesus' crucifixion would be upon them and not him. Bible critics have pointed out that this was unusual behaviour for Pilate, renowned as he was for being a brutal and apparently conscienceless man. Indeed he was that- but the point is that the Lord Jesus in His time of dying can touch even the person whose conscience appears to be otherwise untouchable. This was and is the power of the cross of Christ. I suggest we are mistaken in reading this as if Pilate wanted them to choose Jesus for release and was mystified they chose Barabbas. He asked them to choose, knowing they had delivered Jesus to him out of envy. He wanted them to take the choice, in an attempt to assuage his own conscience.

*Envy-* James 4:5 reminds us that "The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy" (s.w.). Envy is a basic human tendency which we must restrain. In the whole process of the Lord's betrayal, abuse and crucifixion we see the end result of basic human tendencies when they are let go unrestrained. The crucifixion of God's Son is where they lead. This is the shocking message of the whole process the Gospels record concerning the Lord's death at the hands of the Jews. The point is that we have the same nature, and unrestrained, we shall end up in essence doing the same.

*27:19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat-* This may not be strictly chronological. The AV offers: "When he was set down...", as if he had no sooner sat down to consider the case when the message came from his wife, implying that Jesus was a righteous man and should not be crucified with Pilate's involvement. In any case, I suggest that this piece of information is given to explain why Pilate acted as he did in offering the Jews a choice between Jesus and Barabbas, knowing full well that "they had delivered [Jesus] out of envy" and therefore blindly wanted his destruction. Although usually conscienceless, Pilate's own nagging conscience was confirmed by the message from his wife, and therefore he came up with this idea of trying to offload responsibility onto the Jews, forcing them to effectively chose that Jesus should be crucified. Of course, the power was ultimately with Pilate, and this was but a desperate ploy to avoid ultimate guilt; but the fact he did it reflects the degree to which the Lord Jesus can touch even the hardest consciences.

*His wife-* It seems it was Origen who started the tradition that she later became a Christian thanks to a dream given her about Jesus.

*Suffered many things*- These are the very same Greek words used at least four times to record the Lord's prediction of His crucifixion as being a 'suffering of many things' (Mt. 16:21; Mk. 9:12; Lk. 9:22; 17:25). This sensitive woman had a correct premonition of what was to happen to the Lord, and dreamed about it; and sensing His innocence and origin from God, she didn't want her husband to be involved in bringing those sufferings about. Again this claim has the ring of truth to it the more it is meditated upon.

27:20 *But the chief priests...*- The Greek *deh* translated "But" is often untranslated in English, it's a connecting word meaning 'Now... And...'. The idea is not so much that Pilate wanted to release Jesus *but* the priests worked against that. Pilate knew they envied Jesus and were intent on having Him executed, and wished to place the decision as far as he could in their hands in order to not have the Lord's blood on his hands. Such were his attempts to ease his conscience.

*Persuaded the multitude*- It could be that the Jewish leadership also had an uneasy conscience. Pilate wanted to shift the responsibility onto them, and they in turn wanted the crowd to be the ones who made the decision. Because it seems that the person to be released at Passover was not usually chosen by mass decision or request, rather the decision was made by Pilate. But in this case, he gets the Jewish leadership to choose between Jesus and Barabbas. And they in turn get the crowd involved in the choice, just as they kept 'consulting together' before each decision regarding Jesus. This all indicates how conscience was being touched in all those concerned. It is a powerful insight into the degree to which the Lord Jesus and His death can touch the most hardened conscience; and even those who appear to have absolutely no conscience do in fact have one, which can be touched by Christ. We see too the fickleness of the crowd- those who once welcomed Jesus as Messiah just a few days before, were so soon turned around against Him. And then turned back again a few weeks later by Peter's preaching.

27:21 *Which of the two do you want me to release to you?*- Putting together the Gospel records at this point, it is clear that Pilate first asked the Jewish leadership which of the two they wanted, and then he asked the crowd; and it would seem Pilate asked each group the same question at least twice, whilst emphasizing that he did not consider that Jesus was worthy of death and would be happy to release Jesus to them. At first blush this may appear as if Pilate was seeking to persuade first the leaders and then the crowd to allow him to release Jesus to them- and failed to get their agreement. I take a slightly different position. We have noted that Pilate gave the choice to them exactly because he knew that the leaders had delivered Jesus to him *because they envied Jesus* and therefore wanted Him dead. I would understand Pilate's offers to release Jesus as carefully calculated to produce the obvious result- each time the offer was made, the leaders and then the crowd shouted yet louder to destroy Jesus. Those outcomes were not hard to predict. Pilate knew they would respond like this, and he was playing the crowd, rather than simply

making the same appeal to them and being shouted down ever louder each time. But the point to note is surely that he was doing all this to assuage his own conscience; he wanted the Jews to take absolute, widespread and public responsibility for the death of Jesus, and therefore once he had the crowd worked up into a frenzy of desiring Barabbas rather than Jesus, he solemnly washed his hands before them all, claiming that this was totally their choice. Of course, it was ultimately his choice, and he was indeed concerned to hear himself being called 'not Caesar's friend'. My point is that this conscienceless man did in fact have a conscience, which was touched by Jesus and the prospect of His crucifixion. And that is to me the only satisfactory explanation of his long drawn out psychological game with the Jews, and even then it was not ultimately successful nor convincing in distancing himself from the decision to crucify Jesus. See on :22 *What then shall I do to Jesus*.

*27:22 What then shall I do to Jesus-* This is asking an obvious question, seeing that the record has noted that Pilate knew they had delivered Jesus to him out of envy, and they had made it abundantly clear that they sought the death penalty for Him. Pilate asked the question knowing full well the answer they were going to give. But he wanted to elicit from them in clear, specific and public terms that it was *their* wish that Jesus be crucified. See on :21 *Which of the two do you want me to release to you?* It was all part of an extended psychological game Pilate was playing with them, leading them to so clearly take the blame for the Lord's crucifixion. But he only bothered doing this because his conscience was troubling him, and in this we see a powerful insight into the way the Lord's death can touch the hardest of consciences. This is the very reason why reflection upon the Lord in His time of dying leads on naturally to true self-examination. And in this lies the connection between self-examination and the breaking of bread service.

*27:23 Why, what evil has he done?-* Pilate knew that they had delivered Jesus to him from envy, and that there was no legitimate reason for the death sentence. But in line with my commentary on :21 and :22, I suggest he is not so much seeking to change their minds, but rather purposefully seeking to elicit from the Jews a clear statement that they wanted Him crucified.

*They cried out the more-* When people are pressed for a reason for their unreasonable positions and behaviours, they simply say the same thing again, but more loudly (in various ways). This is the classic example- they repeated their cry "Let Him be crucified!". Surely Pilate knew that they would respond like this, and I see him as stage managing the entire crowd, purposefully leading the crowd to cry out ever louder, in order to set the stage for his public washing of his hands. But he played this elaborate game because he had a conscience, and wanted to try to separate himself from the decision to crucify the Lord.

*27:24 When Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing-* I do not take this as meaning that Pilate tried to prevail upon the crowd to change their mind, but now gave up. Rather do I take this as meaning that he realized that he had played his psychological game with the crowd long enough

(see commentary on the previous three verses), and saw that if he played it any longer, then a riot could break out. And so he brought his game to an end, having successfully elicited from them a clear taking of responsibility for the decision to crucify Jesus, and now he washes his hands publically. But this of course did not take away his ultimate responsibility- for he could have simply thrown the case out of court. But he correctly perceived that if he were to do that, then there would be major rebellion against him.

*I am innocent-* The historical Pilate is recorded as killing men for any or even no reason, and being apparently conscienceless. But he is clearly concerned with declaring his own innocence, using a Greek word which means 'without penalty'. He realized there was going to be a penalty paid for crucifying Jesus. Surely he wasn't fearful of his Roman overlords or Caesar himself demanding a penalty for crucifying Jesus. Pilate was clearly aware that there was someone who was going to execute a penalty upon those who crucified Jesus; and Pilate wanted to publically declare his innocence and to protest that he at least should be without penalty. That someone was the one true God. Pilate could not see the death of God's Son without realizing that men are held accountable by God for their part in it. Again we see the power of the cross in touching even the most callous and concealed conscience. We are left to reflect that of course Pilate was not ultimately without responsibility in the decision making- he could have refused. And we therefore reflect further that no man can just declare himself right or innocent before God; that declaration can only be made by God. This is the whole idea of justification, of being counted right. But this requires faith in God and Jesus.

*The blood-* Guilt for the Lord's blood was placed clearly upon the Jews (23:35 "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth", "You intend to bring this man's blood upon us", Acts 5:28). Acts 3:14 condemns Israel for desiring a murderer and rejecting "The Just", the same word used by Pilate "this *just* person". These Scriptures, and many others, clearly place the blame for the Lord's crucifixion upon the Jews rather than Pilate and the Romans, even though Pilate was clearly not innocent. Hence the Lord's observation to Pilate that "he" who had handed Him over to Pilate had "the greater sin" (Jn. 19:11). The "he" was the Jewish system. We marvel at the Lord's grace to Pilate, who clearly was weak and didn't do what he knew he should have done; it's as if He perceived Pilate's struggle of conscience and felt sorry for him about it, and as it were comforts Pilate that although he is sinning, the greater sin was being committed by the Jews. In this again we see how grace and pity ran through all the Lord's actions at this time; facing death, who He essentially was became revealed the more intensely. And He was and is grace, pity and love to their utmost.

*This just person-* Even the deeply immoral Pilate perceived the Lord's sinlessness. He uses the same word as used by his wife in :19 "Have nothing to do with that *just man*". The immoral Herod likewise perceived that John was "a just man" (Mk. 6:20 s.w.). The Centurion echoed Pilate's words as he beheld the Lord's death: "Certainly this was [as Pilate had famously said] a



righteous / just man" (Lk. 23:47 s.w.). If Pilate was purely dealing with this case with no conscience, then he would not have used this term, involving as it does a moral judgment and commendation of Jesus. And we wonder at how Pilate insisted upon writing on the inscription over the cross "Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews", rather than as the Jews wished, 'He *claimed to be* King of the Jews'. Is it too much to think that Pilate had indeed grasped the elemental truth about Jesus and even believed it? Perhaps at that moment, he did- but didn't maintain his faith.

*See to it yourselves-* The very phrase just recently used by the Jews to Judas (:6). It's as if Pilate was aware of how they had treated Judas, and is quoting their own words back to them. It's as if Pilate perceived the Jews as Judas. God certainly saw the Jews and Judas as connected, for they are both termed the great satan / devil / adversary to the Lord Jesus. Pilate' perception and insight at this point is significant, hence my suggestion above that Pilate on one level almost became a believer in Jesus through being exposed to Him close up and by reflecting upon His death. There is indeed something in the death and cross of Christ which brings men to faith. There is surely some truth to the old missionary stories of unresponsive, illiterate tribes becoming strangely responsive when the cross of Christ was explained and portrayed to them.

*27:25 Washed his hands-* Do we feel that our conscience is so dysfunctional and our heart so hardened in some places that nothing much can touch us and motivate us like it used to? The cross can touch and transform the hardest and most damaged heart. Apart from many real life examples around of this, consider the Biblical case of Pilate. Jewish and Roman historians paint a very different picture of Pilate than what we see in the Biblical record. Philo describes him as "ruthless, stubborn and of cruel disposition", famed for "frequent executions without trial". Josephus speaks of him as totally despising the Jews, stealing money from the temple treasury and brutally suppressing unruly crowds. Why then does he come over in the Gospels as a man desperately struggling with his conscience, to the extent that the Jewish crowds manipulate him to order the crucifixion of a man whom he genuinely believed to be innocent? Surely because the person of the Lord Jesus and the awfulness of putting the Son of God to death touched a conscience which appeared not to even exist. If the whole drama of the death of Jesus could touch the conscience and personality of even Pilate, it can touch each of us. Just compare the words of Philo and Josephus with how Mark records that Pilate was "amazed" at the self-control of Jesus under trial (Mk. 15:5); how he almost pleads with his Jewish subjects for justice to be done: "Why, what evil has he done?" (Mk. 15:14). Compare this with how Philo speaks of Pilate as a man of "inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition", famous for "abusive behaviour... and endless savage ferocity". Mt. 27:25 describes how Pilate washes his hands, alluding to the Jewish rite based in Deuteronomy, to declare that he is innocent of the blood of a just man. But Josephus records how Pilate totally despised Jewish religious customs and sensibilities, and appeared to love to commit sacrilege against Jewish things. And in Luke's record, Pilate is recorded as pronouncing Jesus innocent no less than three times. I so admire the way the Lord attempted

even as He faced death in the face, to appeal to Pilate's conscience. I'd paraphrase Mk. 15:2 like this: 'Pilate: 'You are King of Israel?'. Jesus: 'You're saying it". Why did the Lord put it like that? Surely because He knew that Pilate, in his conscience, did actually know that Jesus was King of Israel, and the very words [in the original] 'You are King of Israel' came out of his lips, as a kind of psychological slip. This small incident not only indicates how the suffering Jesus could touch even Pilate's conscience; but that the Lord was eagerly seeking the response of men, even the toughest and unspiritual, right to His very end. And He is the same today. May our feeble responses give Him pleasure and glory.

*His blood is on us and on our children-* The Jews perceived that Pilate was genuinely concerned about his own guilt in the matter, hence their attempt to assure him that it was indeed their choice and responsibility. Again we see how Pilate's conscience was visibly at work. In both his and their attitudes, they wrongly assume that human beings can ascribe and decide guilt. It is impossible for us to do this. The guilt for the Lord's death is apportioned by God and not man. This provides insight into the question of whether the children or descendants of the Jews involved are indeed carrying the guilt for the Lord's blood. It is God who decides individual human guilt; He doesn't punish the children for the sins of their ancestors. Whether or not the ancestors asked for their children to suffer is in this sense irrelevant- it hardly means the descendants will suffer just because of a statement made generations ago. And we should note that the rubric 'We and our children' often refers only to the immediate generation, not to longer distance descendants. Further, there were likely no more than a few hundred people at most who shouted these words; they did not speak them as official representatives of anyone, and they cannot surely refer to the children of any other people [e.g. the rest of Israel] apart from their own. To explain the Holocaust and anti-Jewishness as a fulfilment of these words seems to me quite mistaken. Such things occurred and do occur because of faults within the minds and cultures of those performing them, and not because of any particular guilt in the individual Jews who suffered. Many racial groups have suffered because of baseless aggression from other groups; but it would be facile to posit that the individuals who suffered were somehow guilty as charged by their obsessive attackers. The simple reason for anti-Jewishness is jealousy and the nexus of thinking and action which accompanies it. The fault for murdering and abusing Jewish people is solely with the abusers, and not because of the emotional cry of some members of the Jewish race many generations ago. This verse is a classic example of where although the record of the Bible is inspired, the words recorded as having been on the lips of men are not always true in their content. Sennacherib's claims outside the walls of Jerusalem would be another example.

In reality, the people screamed the words they did because they became increasingly obsessed with the conviction that Jesus was guilty. They were so sure that He was *not* innocent blood, that they were able to confidently ask for any possible guilt to be upon them and their children. Their conviction on this point was therefore very great, and yet it was elicited by the repeated

reminders from Pilate that Jesus was *not* guilty; both Herod and Pilate had concluded the same about Him. Everyone knew the trials were a farce and the case had collapsed from lack of evidence. And yet the more conscience was prodded, the blinder these people became to the evidence. Again we have a telling insight into human nature. Blindness descends upon people the more they are led to the light- unless they respond to it. The Lord's crucifixion is the parade example. This is where human psychology and human nature leads when it is confronted by God's Son, unless there is an acceptance of Him.

*Our children-* Peter addressed this same group just six weeks later, very close to the spot where they shouted this out. And he alludes to their words, by saying that the gift of the Holy Spirit is available to them and to their children (Acts 2:39). I have suggested in *Bible Basics* that in its first context, the gift which the Holy Spirit enabled or gave was that of forgiveness of sins and turning away from sin. In this case, Peter was directly addressing those words of the crowd, willing the Lord's bloodguilt upon them and their children. For those words would be ringing like an echo in the memories of everyone in Jerusalem. Not just for those who had been in the crowd, but for all Jewish people, as they wondered whether God would in fact honour the words of those men upon all Israel. And Peter speaks [as we should in our preaching] directly to those fears of his audience, both spoken and unspoken. The simple fact was that instead of a curse upon them and their children, they and their children could be cleansed in the blood of Christ and find [as Peter had] the blessed gift of forgiveness.