

## The Reason For The Cross (Luke 23:1-26)

We're studying the gospel of Luke. Today, we will look at cp. 23, from v. 1 to 26. The title of the message is "The Reason For The Cross."

### 1. Not for his sin

#### 1-12

<sup>1</sup> Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. <sup>2</sup> 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 Christ, a king." <sup>3</sup> So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. <sup>4</sup> Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man." <sup>5</sup> But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here." <sup>6</sup> On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. <sup>7</sup> When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. <sup>8</sup> When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. <sup>9</sup> He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. <sup>10</sup> The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. <sup>11</sup> Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. <sup>12</sup> That day Herod and Pilate became friends--before this they had been enemies.

The time Luke wrote this gospel was about A.D. 60 when early Christians were caught and accused in various places in Roman Empire.<sup>1</sup> As we look at the Book of Acts, which was also written by Luke, we can see they were accused of two things. First, they were accused of deluding people. (Acts 16:20, 17:6, 24:5) Secondly, they were accused of rebelling against Emperor by making Jesus their king. (Acts 17:7) The scene of Luke 23 is before the scenes of Acts. Here Jesus was already accused of these two things. The chief priests accused Jesus of the things which Pilate couldn't treat lightly. And Pilate's judgment explains clearly to Theophilus and people who read this gospel later that they

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<sup>1</sup> *Life Application Study Bible -New Living Translation*, Tyndale House Publishers, 1996, p.1532

were falsely accused.

According to their accusation, Jesus was investigated. As a result, he was judged to be innocent. Luke says his innocence was confirmed by both Pilate and Herod. Jesus' innocence was repeated many times. And also he It is very clear that Jesus was innocent. Finally Jesus was crucified. But his crucifixion was not because of his own sin.

Because of the accusation from the chief priests, both Pilate and Herod individually investigated Jesus. Pilate and Herod each related to Jesus differently. Let's look at the characteristics of each of their ways, how they related to Jesus.

Pilate asked Jesus the question which he thought was the most important among their accusations, "Are you the king of the Jews?" And Jesus answered "Yes, it is as you say."

Pilate knew that Jesus was popular among the people. Just several days before, when he entered Jerusalem, many people came out to welcome him. In the temple, he drove out those who were selling. The chief priests and the teachers of the law questioned him for this, but on the contrary they were talked down. Every day he taught at the temple and people listened to him gladly. So Pilate might have taken the accusation from the chief priests as the power struggle among Jewish religious leaders. In fact, Matthew and Mark recorded that Pilate noticed that it was out of envy that the chief priests handed Jesus over to him. (Matt 27:18, Mark 15:10) Pilate didn't see Jesus as a dangerous rebel who tried to overthrow Roman Empire.

Pilate announced "I find no basis for a charge against this man," but the chief priests insistently accused Jesus as the leader of rebellion, and demanded Pilate to sentence him to death. No matter how much they accuse him, Pilate didn't find any sin in Jesus that deserves death. When Pilate heard that Jesus was Galilean, by sending him to Herod, he tried to shift the responsibility of judging Jesus to Herod. He thought he could escape from the trouble like this.

Now, what about us? "Ok, so Jesus is the king and the lord for these kind of people. So what? What is that to me?" Do you think like that? If Jesus is not your Lord, then listen carefully, you do not belong to the kingdom of God or heaven, because in the kingdom of God, in heaven, Jesus is the king and the Lord.

"But if I receive Jesus as my Lord, my relationship with those who don't

accept this will become awkward. But I don't like the idea that I cannot enter the kingdom of God, heaven. Hmm, sounds complicated. Is there any way to escape from this problem? Oh, I know how. I will ask the opinion of someone else, and leave the matter to that person's judgment."

Who is the person? Whose opinion are you going to follow? To save your time, I can give you the answer, you don't have to ask around. If you ask those who belong to the kingdom of God, heaven, they will answer "Jesus is my Lord." If you ask those who don't belong to the kingdom of God, heaven, they will answer "Jesus was a good teacher, a great religious leader, but he actually doesn't mean anything to me." Which group do you want to belong to? Your relationship with Jesus, this is something YOU have to decide, this is an important matter you cannot avoid.

Now, let's look at Herod.

Herod was delighted to see Jesus. It was almost like for us to see a famous movie star. For a long time he had been wanting to see Jesus perform some miracle. Here's his chance. However, no matter how he plied him with many questions, Jesus gave him no answer.

The chief priests and the teachers of the law had been accusing Jesus insistently. But Herod didn't listen to them. He didn't think it was the case he had to deal with. For Herod, Jesus was just one of those entertainments. No matter how much he provoke Jesus, Jesus didn't perform any miracle, nor did he tell any interesting stories nor proverbs, so finally he ridiculed and mocked Jesus as much as he liked, and sent him back to Pilate.

What about us? We believe Jesus is God, almighty God, right? I seriously believe Jesus can still perform miracles Bible records even today. We pray because we believe in God's miracle. He can solve difficult problems, open the closed doors, and even walk on the water. Then, what is our attitude toward Jesus? If we ask Jesus, we can get whatever we want? Everything goes as we wish? Is Jesus just like a convenient giant coming out from a magical jar to grant our wish or a magical cane to control things as we wish? Or is he "my Lord"?

Jesus is my fortress, my help in times of trouble, my comfort in times of sufferings, and strength when I am weak. He gives us joy and pleasure. There is excitement in our fellowship with him! That is indeed so. But if we have fellowship with Jesus just to get those joy, pleasure and excitement, or just to feel good, then he is not that different from effective painkiller and strong energy

drink. Is he a magician who entertains us? Or is he "my Lord"?

For you, who is Jesus? Our relationship with Jesus; that is an important factor that determines our eternal destiny. Each one of us needs to decide it for ourselves.

## 2. Not his punishment

### 13-25

<sup>13</sup> Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, <sup>14</sup> and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. <sup>15</sup> Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. <sup>16</sup> Therefore, I will punish him and then release him." <sup>18</sup> With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" <sup>19</sup> (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.) <sup>20</sup> Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. <sup>21</sup> But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" <sup>22</sup> For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him." <sup>23</sup> But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. <sup>24</sup> So Pilate decided to grant their demand. <sup>25</sup> 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.

In v.1, the chief priests, the Jews led Jesus off to Pilate. And they accused him as a rebel against Roman Empire. Here the situation is reversed. Now, Pilate, the authority of the Roman Empire called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people. And he declared Jesus' innocence and said he would release him.

Pilate declared Jesus' innocence and sentenced his release three times. If we include v.4 which is before this section, he declared his innocence 4 times. But to this, the high priests, the rulers and the people kept shouting, "Crucify him!" Not only that, but when they heard Pilate would release Jesus, they asked Pilate to release Barabbas instead.

Barabbas was caught and thrown into prison for a certain rebellion and

murder. He was sentenced to death and was just waiting for the execution.

For the 3<sup>rd</sup> time, when Pilate declared Jesus' innocence and sentenced his release, the people kept shouting for Jesus' crucifixion and the release of Barabbas with even louder voice. They no longer listened to Pilate no matter what he said. And finally Pilate decided to grant their demand.

Jesus was innocent, and should have been released. But because of the demand from high priests, the rulers and the people, Barabbas was released and Jesus was handed over to them. They did to Jesus as they wished. That is, they crucified him.

Luke emphasized that Jesus was crucified by the people who don't accept Jesus as their Savior, Lord and God, although he was innocent and should have been released. Not accepting Jesus as Savior, Lord and God is the same as taking part in shouting for Jesus' crucifixion.

Jesus was crucified, but the crucifixion was not punishment for Jesus.

We can learn several things from the people who took part in crucifying Jesus. Let's look at them one by one.

First, let's look at the chief priests and the rulers.

At first sight, they appeared to be seeking the stability of Roman Empire, and the order and justice in the society. But actually, they were desperate to remove Jesus. Their aim is to remove Jesus. So they lost the ability to make the right judgment. They couldn't see the evil as evil any longer. However, they had no doubt that they were right, they knew the truth and were practicing it.

The demand for justice. Sometimes the demand for justice can be the flip side of our desire for revenge. Sometimes, we demand justice saying, "We should or shouldn't do such and such". But we may be unconsciously making this kind of judgment because of our jealousy against someone who we think is superior to us, or someone who we think is more fortunate than us. In that case, denying or attacking the person itself will become justice for us. Then our sense of justice is actually totally wrong.

Just because we feel we are doing something for righteousness or justice, it doesn't guarantee that our sense of righteousness is truly right. The chief priests knew the law, but they slipped off from the truth. We must always humble ourselves before the light of God's truth, and listen to Him. We must examine ourselves and see if our demand for justice didn't come from our

revenge against someone or our desire for recognition. And if we notice we slipped off from the truth, immediately we must stop, and change our ways. We need the true courage to do this without worrying about what other people think.

Next, let's look at the crowd.

As a result of joining the chief priests and rulers in denying Jesus, they ended up having among them the cause of riot and murder.

Who did the crowd support? They supported the chief priests and leaders. It may be natural for them to do that, because of the social structure. But I wonder if they had ever thought about what would happen as a result of their supporting them, demanding to release Barabbas. I suspect they just followed them without thinking much.

Because of their unclear understanding of the Bible, they followed the chief priests and denied Jesus. That is understandable. But why did they join the chief priests in demanding the release of Barabbas? They should have known that Barabbas caused the riot and he was a murderer. If he has repented in the prison and he has totally changed his ways, then that will be another story. But he had been just caught, and was a criminal who was about to be put to death. If such a person was suddenly released and lived in your neighborhood, what would happen? You can imagine. However, they have demanded Pilate to release Barabbas many times. Why did they do such a horrible thing?

There are some people who follow someone not because they like his ideas and principles, but because they believe they will receive some kind of benefit by following him. And there are some people who just follow the crowd without thinking where they are going and why they are doing it, but they do it just because everyone else is doing it. And there are even some people who just enjoy shouting, or opposing the authority.

Why does it happen? There may be many reasons. Maybe they think they cannot make the right judgment. At least they feel safe if they are with others. Or they don't think about the outcome. Even if they think about it, it may change on the way. And if it doesn't work, they will be disappointed. Or they might attach all the responsibility to others, and they themselves remain passive. If the situation turns bad, they feel grudges or anger, but they don't try to find solution by themselves. Or possibly there may be many other reasons. In any case, I think the underlying factors are fear and anxiety.

They joined the chief priests, rulers and other people in denying Jesus

and in demanding Barabbas' release. While they were doing that, they must have forgotten about the fear and anxiety in them. As a result, they ended up having among themselves the cause of riot, and murder. So now they have more fears and anxieties in their lives. That is really ironic.

Now another one is Barabbas.

Thanks to Jesus, Barabbas was saved from the death penalty. He was released. His wrong doing will not bind him any longer. He can spend his days as a free person without blame, not as a criminal waiting for execution. He is no longer a condemned criminal Barabbas. But he started new life as a new person Barabbas. And instead of him, Jesus was crucified.

This truly illustrates a powerful and liberating truth of the gospel. At the cross a **great exchange** took place! Jesus took our place when he died. Bearing all of our sin, Jesus paid the price of punishment for sin, suffering a horrible death of crucifixion and separation from God, the Father. The written code that was against us was cancelled. (Col 2:14) We are set free from the bondage of sin. (Rom 8:2) We don't have to be afraid of God or avoid God's eye. We can live rejoicing for God, being loved by Him and loving Him.

Human beings are made in the image of God. Without relationship with God, we cannot correctly understand ourselves nor accept ourselves. Human beings are made to live in the relationship with God. But his relationship with God was cut off by sin. It is Jesus who can make the relationship possible again. By accepting Jesus, we can recover who we really are, and grow into a person God intended each of us to be.

### 3. Not his cross

#### 26

<sup>26</sup> As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

Simon from Cyrene happened to pass by. The people who were going to crucify Jesus seized Simon, put the cross on him and forced him to carry it.

The cross Simon carried was not his cross. But as he was forced to carry it, he carried the cross by himself and followed Jesus.

If we think carefully, it is not Jesus' cross either. As we have already seen Jesus had no sin. They didn't find anything in him that deserves death penalty. Rather he deserved to be released. According to the judgment, there was no reason Jesus has to be crucified. So, that cross is not Jesus' cross either.

Then why was Jesus crucified?

#### 4. The Reason For the Cross

"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy ... and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." (Eph 5:25-27)

We are forgiven by the cross of Jesus. We will not be condemned as sinners. Does God do this so that we will be free from guilt and shame from the past and live comfortably? Is that it?

God does this so that our relationship with Him will be restored. If we are afraid that God might blame us, how can we enjoy our relationship with Him? While we are troubled by our feelings of shame and guilt before God, how can we truly know, "God loves me, and He is pleased with me"? The forgiveness of sin makes it possible for us to have a healthy relationship with God. And it also makes it possible for us to forgive each other, to appreciate our differences, to restore relationships, to come together before him as his bride.

The cross of Jesus gives us hope for heaven and eternal life. When you go to heaven, what will you do there eternally? Will we have wings like angels, float on the cloud and play the harp? Is heaven a place where we can eat, sleep, play and do whatever we want as much as we like?

Heaven is a place where we will have glorious fellowship with Holy God. In eternity, we as his bride will be loved by his love which is beyond our understanding, and we will also love him. This love never fails, but it will grow greater and deeper. We as his bride will come to know this wonderful God through eternity.

"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy ... and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." (Eph 5:25-27)

The cross of Jesus invites us into His love. He said, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love." (John 15:9)

By the cross of Jesus, all your sins are forgiven. The written code that was against you was cancelled. (Col 2:14) You are set free from the bondage of sin. (Rom 8:2) How you live after that. That is up to you.

Simon was forced to carry the cross. But nobody forces you to carry the cross and follow Jesus. That is an invitation from Jesus.

"Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34)

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love." (John 15:9)