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Passion Scenes: Delivered!

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TEXT: Mark 15:1-20 (ESV)

And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." And the chief priests accused him of many things. And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.

Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" And they cried out again, "Crucify him." And Pilate said to them, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage

to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

Dear friends,

We have seen recently how ugly a mob can get when it gets stirred up and out of control. January 6th was an awful day in America's history, wasn't it? Well, we see that kind of terrible behavior at work in our story for today. Jesus is brought to Pilate by the religious authorities. They had condemned Him as guilty of blasphemy against God in their kangaroo court the night before. They'd beaten Him up badly, condemned Him to death. Now they have delivered Jesus to the governor for execution. They didn't have that kind of authority themselves. They wanted Pilate to do it for them. But they knew the Pilate would brush them off if they just brought the charge of blasphemy. He couldn't care less about those sort of things. They needed a political strategy to get their way, so they took the word "messiah" and they politicized it. The word "messiah," which they had asked Jesus about being and He had said "yes" to, could be construed as a political king. If they say He's calling himself a king, that would be considered a challenge to Caesar's authority and considered a capital crime deserving of death.

So that's what they did. Pilate asks Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You said so." Not much there for Pilate to work with – it's a rather non-committal response, elusive. Pilate doesn't see any guilt in Jesus. "Is He guilty of sedition?" he wonders. Perhaps, but He doesn't look or talk like a threat to national security. And where are His followers? Why aren't they standing here under arrest along with Him? This isn't much of a movement. He doesn't seem guilty of anything. In fact, He looks harmless and pitiful. Pilate is not sure what to do with Jesus. He doesn't trust those chief priests any further than he can throw them. It appears to him like they are just envious of this man's popularity, and he's wondering, "What shall I do with him now?" These accusations continue to be brought. Pilate tries to get Jesus to defend Himself, but it's to no avail. Jesus remained silent and Pilate is amazed by this.

A crowd has gathered by this time and things are starting to get unruly. And that makes Pilate more than a little nervous. He's under no obligation to hold anything approaching a fair trial. His main aim is to prevent riots, to keep peace, to get through this Passover season without major trouble. And this crowd is turning into more of a

mob. Pilate, has an idea, he tries to placate the mob. He says, "Usually I release a prisoner of Passover time as an act of goodwill. How about I release Jesus, the King of the Jews?" The crowd, which was stirred up by the chief priest, said, "No, we want Barabbas released." Now, Barabbas was a freedom fighter, an insurrectionist, and a murderer who had been arrested, put in prison, and was waiting for his execution. It was probably easy to get the crowd charged up about Barabbas, I suppose, because he at least, was a man of action against these Roman oppressors. Jesus was turning out to be a big disappointment as a king. He didn't act like a king. Pilate asked, "Well, then, what should I do with Jesus?" "Crucify Him," they said. So Pilate gave in – he had Jesus whipped terribly, and then delivered Him over to be crucified, to satisfy the mob and to maintain the peace.

As Jesus was waiting to be delivered up to the cross, the Roman soldiers decided to have a little fun with Him at His expense. They mocked Him and treated Him with such contempt. They stripped Him down and then put on a purple robe, which is a royal color, and pressed a crown of thorns hard onto His head, where He started bleeding. A stick was given Him for a kingly scepter, with which they later hit Him. They mockingly saluted Him, "Hail, king of the Jews." They knelt in homage before Him and then spit on Him, then grabbed the stick away and hit Him over and over again. Such cruelties, such despicable, disgusting, dehumanizing behavior; false accusations in line with murderous intent, envy, hatred, animosity, a politician playing a crowd, giving in to its bloodthirsty cries, Roman law being ignored, an innocent man sentenced to death, a murderer released, a stirred up, raging mob screaming, "Crucify Him, crucify Him," forcing Pilate's hand in order to please them and keep the peace, out of control, malicious behavior. And Jesus had done absolutely nothing to any of them. Then the inhumane scourging of Jesus within an inch of His life just for show. And the soldiers' cruel, emotional, and physical torture of Jesus. It's enough to make us shake our heads and say, "How low can you go? How could this be happening?"

Walt Wangerin, reflecting on this scene in his little book, *Reliving the Passion*, writes, "We are now at the climax of human hatred. This rage requires no rationale. This hatred has no reason but itself. God and the children of Adam are enemies, for the children rebelled against their God and enemies hate. That's enough to say, 'Behold, a people in desperate need of forgiveness.'" And that's why Jesus is there, isn't it?

In the midst of this narrative, a word is used that we should pay special attention to before we despair over humanity. The word is “delivered.” Jesus was delivered to Pilate and then delivered to be crucified. We've heard that word used before. Jesus had told his disciples that He would be delivered into the hands of men – delivered over to the chief priests who will condemn Him to death, and then deliver Him over to the gentiles to be mocked and spit upon, flogged and killed. And when Jesus told them that one of them would betray Him, the word He used for “betray” really is translated “deliver” in the Greek language. He was delivered to His suffering and death, so we could be delivered from ours. That's the big idea here. He suffered our punishment so that we could be spared – the punishment that we deserve.

Later on in the New Testament, the apostle Paul will use this word deliver again. In Romans 4:24 he writes, “Jesus was delivered up for our trespasses.” And in Romans 8:32, he says, “God delivered Jesus to death for us.” And in Galatians 2, he uses that word as he describes Jesus giving Himself up for us. And in the book of Colossians, he writes that, “He delivered us from the domain of darkness.” So as we observe this horrific day, we also know that Jesus was being delivered so we could be delivered from sin and death and the power of the devil. And that's good news for us. For those of us, every one of us, who are sinners in God's sight, separated from Him.

Now, in the midst of all this, Pilate asks a question that demands a response; a personal response from each of us. He asks, “What should I do with Jesus?” There are a few options to consider. First, Max Lucado writes about this scene in his book, *The Angels Were Silent*, and he says this:

Perhaps you're like a Pilate: curious about this one called Jesus. And you, like Pilate, are puzzled by his claims and stirred by his passions. You've heard the stories: God descending the stars, cocooning in flesh, placing a stake of truth in the globe. You, like Pilate, have heard others speak about Him. Now you would like Him to speak to you. What do you do with a man who claims to be God yet hates religion? What do you do with a man who calls Himself savior, yet condemns systems? What do you do with a man who knows the place and time of His death yet goes there anyway? Pilate's question is yours.

What will I do with this man? Jesus, you have two choices. You can reject him. That is an option, to just walk away from Him. Or you can accept him. You can journey with Him and follow Him.

Friend, let me ask you: have you said, “Yes, I’m a sinful person in need of your forgiveness, Jesus, and I want to follow you?” Because you can do that right now. It’s not too late. He loves you, He allowed Himself to be delivered up so that you could be delivered.

Also, there’s something else you can do if you’ve already said yes to Jesus: you can thank Him. N.T. Wright, in his commentary on the Gospel of Mark, gives this insight:

The story of Barabbas invites us to see Jesus’ crucifixion in terms of a stark personal exchange. Barabbas deserves to die. Jesus dies instead, and he goes free. The guilty man was freed and the innocent crucified. God’s grace, God’s sovereign and saving presence, is exactly what we are witnessing in this story. In reading the story of the guilty man freed and the innocent man crucified, it’s not hard to identify with Barabbas and to view the rest of the story with the awestruck gaze of people who think, “There, but for God’s grace, go I.”

When we learn to read the story of Jesus and see it as the story of the love of God doing for us what we couldn’t do for ourselves, that insight produces again and again the sense of astonished gratitude, which is at the heart of authentic Christian experience. You can say thanks.

Question is: is there anything else? How can I say thanks to Him with just words? You can live your life giving thanks. A story from Pastor Jim Bjorge, one of my favorite Lutheran preachers, comes to mind when I consider this question. He writes:

It was summertime and a group of young people from our church were spending a week at camp in the Black Hills. One afternoon, they traveled to nearby Sylvan Lake to spend some time swimming in its cool, clear waters. A large formation a short distance from the shoreline beckoned the adventuresome. They climbed its ledges and jubilantly jumped and dived into the water below. As the time slipped by, one by one, they swam back to shore after experiencing the thrills. All of a sudden, a boy began to thrash in the water as he was heading to the shoreline. He was a poor swimmer and never should have attempted going to that diving rock at all. As he hollered, he swallowed water and began to panic. One of his buddies a few yards behind him came to his rescue. His friend knew the life-saving procedures and promptly got him to shore. Later, in the dressing room of the bathhouse, the guys were combing their hair and getting ready to go back to camp, the rescuer, reaching into his pocket for his comb, only to find he had forgotten it. He then asked the young man, whom he had just pulled from

the water for his comb. Answer was quick: "I don't want to get your dandruff on my comb." Then there was a silent pause. He knew at once the stupidity of his statement. He had just denied the use of his cheap comb to a fellow who had saved his life. He handed over his comb, a sheepish grin covering his embarrassment.

And Pastor Bjorge makes his comment:

When I think of God's great service mission at Calvary, saving me from sin and death in the power of the devil, how can I say "no" if He asks for my comb of courtesy to others or my tools for the teaching of his love?

It's a good question. I would also add to that: how can I say "no" when he asks me for my talents, for my time and my treasure, my very life, for bringing others to Him, for their deliverance? That's living a life of thanks for what He's done for us. He was delivered for us so that we could be delivered. We can say thanks in how we live our lives, serving Him by serving others.

So let's use this prayer today to close our message:

Lord, I invite you to come and live your life in me today. Lord, here's my brain. Think through it. Think with it. Lord, here's my face. Smile through it. Here's my tongue; so speak to people with it. Lord, here are my ears. Listen to persons with them. Lord here's my hands. Touch someone with them. Lord, here are my arms. Lift and hug someone with them, serve them. Lord, here are my feet. Walk with them where you want to go today. Because, Lord, I want to be a beautiful Christ in person. Use my whole being to your glory and honor. In the name of Jesus, who was delivered up so that I might be delivered, I pray, amen.